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THREE PLAYS for the AUSTRALIAN STAGE

BY
ARTHUR. H. ADAMS.

"THE WASTERS."
"GALAHAD JONES."
"MRS PRETTY AND THE PREMIER."

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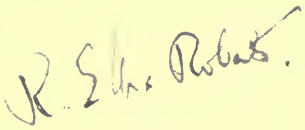

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THREE PLAYS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN STAGE

By ARTHUR H. ADAMS.

The Wasters,

Galahad Jones,

Mrs. Pretty and the Premier.

SYDNEY:
WILLIAM BROOKS & CO. LTD., PRINTERS,
17 Castlereagh Street.

1914.

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INDUCTION.

This selection from my later plays is arranged in chronological order. Excluding my first attempt at writing for the stage, "Tapu," a Maori Comic Opera, completed with the assistance of the late J. C. Williamson, during my engagement with him as literary secretary, and subsequently produced by him throughout Australasia, my tale of plays begins with "Ironside Penruddock," a Cromwellian romantic play. This was my only effort in romantic drama, and since then I have devoted myself to modern comedy. The first in this line was "The Tame Cat"; then followed in order, "The New Chum," a light comedy of the Maoriland backblocks; "The Wasters"; "Galahad Jones," a dramatisation of my novel of the same name; "Mrs. Pretty and the Premier"; and an Australian children's play. Another Australian comedy is now in the arduous process of being re-written. Meantime I have written about a dozen one-act comedies.

"The Tame Cat" was produced in Sydney by an amateur organisation on July 11th, 1908, and subsequently revived. "The Wasters" was produced by the Adelaide Literary (now Repertory) Theatre on August 27th, 1910. "Galahad Jones," written in 1910, has not yet been produced, nor has "Mrs. Pretty and the Premier," written in 1912, though it is down for presentation by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre this year. In each case the run of the play was for one consecutive night.

One of my one-act plays has been produced five times by different organisations, including the Sydney Stage Society and the Adelaide Literary Theatre; another has had a matinee performance in London. A volume of these one-acters is in contemplation.

These plays were written for the Australian Stage. One of the many drawbacks to their production is that there is no Australian Stage. These plays do not claim to be Repertory plays: they were written for the Australian commercial theatre—though it must be admitted that, so far, the controlling destinies of the Australian commercial stage have not quite grasped my intention. The reception, and rejection, of these comedies by various Australian theatrical managers has invariably been polite.

The publication of these plays is not to be regarded as a claim for their consideration as literature, even dramatic literature. They were deliberately built for the commercial theatre, and, judged by the ethics of the theatrical manager, with some expert assistance from the box-office, they stand or fall. Their appearance in book-form is a mere formal filing of certain attempts to deal dramatically with Australian conditions viewed from an Australian standpoint by the creation of characters essentially Australian. They do not deal with the Bush. My conviction is that the Australian town-dweller is as typically and as distinctively national as the extinct bushranger. Yet this thesis forms

no part of my dramatic intent. These plays merely happen to be Australian in tone because they were written by an Australian in an Australian environment. It is for this reason that I may be permitted to hope that they may be found of interest to Australians, and, ultimately, to the rulers of the Australian commercial stage. These plays, crudely prospecting the almost virgin field of the Australian Drama, are modestly put on record to serve as an encouragement or a warning to the horde of better equipped explorers that will surely come.

ARTHUR H. ADAMS.

"Marama," Cremorne Road,
Cremorne Point, Sydney.
June, 1914.

NOTE: Neither plot nor incident in these plays has been taken from actual happenings, or founded on fact. As it was necessary for the author's characters to have names, name have either been invented or selected from a directory without any knowledge of the persons bearing them. If there is a "John Dangar" or a "Galahad Jones" or a "Mrs. Pretty," that individual is assured that the author has no knowledge of him or her, and that the incidents in which I have made him or her figure exist only in my imagination. Also, if there is an individual whose business career resembles that of John Dangar, I know and impute nothing about his private life; if there is a bank-clerk, who like Galahad Jones, has assaulted his bank-manager, I am merely interested, and expect him to be merely interested, at a curious coincidence; if there is a charming widow, the owner of an estate resumed by a State Government, like that of Mrs. Pretty's, she must not imagine that I am accusing her of having been so curiously compromised in the private office of a State Premier.

THE WASTERS.

THE WASTERS

Comedy in Three Acts.

ACT ONE: Reception Hall at "Ulladulla," Pott's Point, Sydney (Sunday Morning).

ACT TWO: The Underskirt Department in the Shop of John Dangar and Co., Sydney (Monday Morning).

ACT THREE: The same as Act One (Monday Evening).

PERSONS IN THE COMEDY.

JOHN DANGAR	BABY DANGAR
GUY DANGAR	BUTLER
ANTHONY CLIBBORN	LINDSAY THONG
TOSSIE QUORK	J. CHARTERIS MAGGS
MRS. GOODSIR	MRS. MEGGET
MRS. CRONK	ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE

MRS. CLIBBORN

Several Society Friends of Mrs. Dangar's.

"THE WASTERS" was produced by the Adelaide Literary Theatre, on August 27th, 1910, with the following cast:—

JOHN DANGAR	WILFRID NEILL
BABY DANGAR	MABEL HARDINGE
GUY DANGAR	RICHARD BATES
BUTLER	HOWARD REID
ANTHONY CLIBBORN	FRANK WILKINSON
LINDSAY THONG	DOUGLAS WALSH
TOSSIE QUORK	IVY STACEY
J. CHARTERIS MAGGS	FRANK JOHNSTON
MRS. GOODSIR	RUBY SOUTER
MRS. MEGGET	DOROTHEA JACOB
MRS. CRONK	REBE BLOOM
ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE	ROSE JARVIS
MRS. CLIBBORN	SADIE HIOSAN

The play produced by Wilfrid Neill.

ACT ONE.

SCENE: *The reception hall of "Ulladulla," the residence of John Dangar, Pott's Point, Sydney, Australia, is furnished as a living room, with comfortable chairs, tables covered with spring flowers, etc. The entrance is from the vestibule, through an archway draped by a portière. Further up in the same wall is a door, giving access to John Dangar's dressing-room. There is another door opposite to the vestibule entrance. In the fireplace, in this warm Australian spring weather, there is no fire. At the back are two tall French windows, both of which are now open to let in the bright morning sunlight. Through these windows can be discerned a stone balustrade, down which stone steps evidently lead to the water front. Over the balustrade can be seen the waters of Sydney Harbour, Garden Island, and the red roofs of North Shore.*

It is Sunday morning. The room is empty.
The voice of a man is heard from another room.

THE MAN'S VOICE: Baby! Baby!
(*There is no answer.*)

JOHN DANGAR enters from his dressing room.
(*He is a keen-eyed, dry, clean-shaven, alert business man of 51. He is in his shirt sleeves, and carries his tie in his hand. He has evidently been worried over his stud.*)

JOHN: Confound this stud! Baby! Where the devil is my wife?

MRS. DANGAR enters from the garden through the French window.
(*She is in morning costume—a charming and costly dress. She is of the usual married woman's age—39. A pretty woman, with a figure carefully attended to. At first appearance she suggests the frivolous, useless type. Her face, with its almost childish charm, explains why the epithet of "Baby," given her as a girl, has stuck to her so long.*)

BABY: What's the matter, John?

JOHN: The usual trouble—studs.

BABY: Only that? Come here, dear. I've had breakfast half-an-hour ago. I've been down in the garden looking at the marquee. Stand still. What helpless things you men are! There, now!

JOHN: Thanks, Baby. Don't know why somebody can't invent a stud that works itself.

BABY: Give me your tie. Now!

JOHN: Not that way, Baby. You women can't even tie a tie properly. Always do the thing the wrong way. I believe every woman is left-handed.

BABY: Right about face, sir! Am I doing it, or you? Now!

JOHN: Um—looks a bit lop-sided; but it'll do.

BABY: Seeing that I've tied your tie and fixed your studs for—oh, don't let us count up the years!—it ought to do.

JOHN: Yes, a man must grumble, Baby.
(*He kisses her.*)

BABY: Every man grumbles before his breakfast.

JOHN: I don't really know what I'd do without you, dear.

BABY: Ah, we women are of some use, after all.

JOHN: Yes, for tying ties.

BABY: Thank you, lord and master. Now be a good little boy and run away and put on your coat. You can be trusted to do that by yourself, can't you? Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes.

JOHN: I thought I'd just run down and look at the marquee.

BABY: Not before your breakfast.

(*JOHN goes up to French window and looks out.*)

JOHN: Sure it's big enough?

BABY: It will hold every employee in the shop.

JOHN: This dance to-morrow ought to be a big success. It was a great idea, wasn't it? to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of John Dangar and Co. by a big ball to our employees. It will be a great advertisement.

BABY: It's really a kind of copper wedding of the shop, isn't it?

JOHN: A copper wedding? Yes. But that reminds me—how long have we been married, Baby?

BABY: Twenty-three years last October.

JOHN: Twenty-three? Then——

BABY: No; we didn't celebrate our own copper wedding.

JOHN: Never crossed my mind, Baby. But I remembered the anniversary last year, didn't I?

BABY: The inevitable brooch. I counted them up. That's how I knew.

JOHN: Baby!

BABY: Oh, I didn't mind, really. You're such a busy man, John. Besides, our marriage doesn't require an advertisement, and the shop does. By the way, John, do you know where I went yesterday?

JOHN: Shopping, of course. Bought another hat?

BABY: No; I was motoring down Redfern, to see that poor sales-girl who got into trouble, you remember; and the motor was passing through one of those dirty, mean little streets, when it struck me as familiar. I stopped and got out, and went into a little draper's shop—oh, a dingy little draper's shop! And a dingy old woman came to the counter, and I bought a reel of cotton.

JOHN: Well, I can stand that. It's your hats that——

BABY: Guess whose shop that was?

JOHN: Not before breakfast, Baby.

BABY: Ours!

JOHN: Ours?

BABY: Not now, of course. It was ours once. It was the very shop we began from.

JOHN: Our first shop! So it's still there?

BABY: Just the same. Just as hopeless and mean and cheap and dingy as when it was "Dangar and Clibborn, Drapers."

JOHN: Well, old girl, we've got past that, haven't we?

BABY: Yes, thank God. But when I came away I made Simpson take me right round the big block of Dangar and Co. And when I looked up at our enormous store, with its acres of floor-space, its miles of plate-glass, its hundreds of sales-girls, its long line of motors waiting in front, I just thought——

JOHN: That we'd got on, eh?

BABY: I was humbly thankful. And that old dingy, snuffling woman in the old shop—if it hadn't been for you, your ambition and energy and business ability—well, that was what I would have been by now.

JOHN: Oh, it was just luck.

BABY: Luck? No, John, it was genius.

JOHN: Seriously, Baby, looking back on it all, I see now that it was just chance that I went ahead.

BABY: No, you were bound to succeed.

JOHN: Not if those first investments had gone wrong. Not if Clibborn had been right.

BABY: But Mr. Clibborn wasn't right. You were.

JOHN: Yes, as it turned out. But I took risks, and it happened that I won. Clibborn wouldn't come in with me in what he called my rash speculations—and really, they were nothing but speculations. But Clibborn was always absurdly over-cautious. A business man must be a bit of a buccaneer. And yet it was touch and go that I didn't come to smash. But I pulled through; and since then everything has come my way. The firm of Dangar simply built itself up with the expansion of Sydney. Begun where it was, on that corner site, it was bound to become the biggest drapery business in the State; while Clibborn—my old partner in that little hopeless shop in Redfern——

BABY: But you gave him his chance to come in with you as partner in those speculations.

JOHN: Yes, I needed him—then. I needed his ready cash to stiffen up my promises. But he was too cautious. It was at his own request that we dissolved partnership. I bet he's sorry—now. And I've gone up and up, and he's never done anything.

BABY: I'm glad, though, that you didn't forget him.

JOHN: That was the least I could do for my first partner. And he's useful as my accountant. He's slow; but he's safe. I can depend on him. But lately I've begun to think that the business is getting too big for his little peddling ways. He won't have any of these new labor-saving devices—card-indexes, loose-leaf ledgers, and all that. He's too old-fashioned for modern business methods. I'll have to retire him on a pension.

BABY: Retire Mr. Clibborn?

JOHN: Yes, I know it won't be easy. He can't forget that once he was my partner in that little shop in Redfern. And do you know what he had the cheek to suggest, or rather to hint, the other day?

BABY: He wanted you to take him into partnership.

JOHN: How did you know that?

BABY: Oh, I've always known. He wanted it from the first, as soon as he saw the business was going to succeed. He feels very bitter against you.

JOHN: Failures always do.

BABY: That's the reason why Mr. Clibborn has never set foot in this house.

JOHN: I've asked him often enough. But I thought it was something to do with his wife.

BABY: His wife? A sales-girl? Oh, she's impossible, socially impossible. I couldn't ever take her up. But that wouldn't prevent him from dropping over, say on a Sunday morning like this, just to see you—and me. I'd be glad enough to see him. I don't like anybody to hate you. And I can't forget that once he was your partner in those dear old days in Redfern. He used to come to our stuffy little house often enough then. And, really, I don't see why you couldn't take him in, even now, as your partner—a junior partner. You needn't let him have any real power.

JOHN: Baby, I'm always amused at your idea of business. You seem to think that money makes itself, and that I could afford to let Clibborn in without risk.

BABY: I'm sure Dangar's just runs itself.

JOHN: It wouldn't run long if Clibborn got hold of it. My dear, this is business, and I never let sentiment interfere with business.

BABY: Business! Men talk of business more reverently than they talk of God. And they always tell women that we poor things can't understand business.

JOHN: Well, can they? Can you run your own, Baby?

BABY: My own?

JOHN: You've got your own private banking account; and I'll bet you don't know how much it is overdrawn at this minute.

BABY: Is it overdrawn?

JOHN: Don't you know?

BABY: Why should I? I just write cheques and don't bother.

JOHN: Well, of course I can afford it, dear; but I would rather you didn't overdraw any more this week. Got any big bills to pay?

BABY: Lots. Bills are always with us.

JOHN: Well, let them wait for a week. I'm rather short myself just now—too many irons in the fire.

BABY: John, did you ever know me in a hurry to pay bills?

JOHN: Baby, I wish you'd take a little interest in my business. You've never even asked me what schemes I'm putting my money into.

BABY: Silly boy! You're always dinning it into my ears that women are mentally incapable of understanding business.

JOHN: I've often wondered why.

BABY: I'll tell you. It's because you men never try to interest us in business. A woman wants only to be interested in the things that interest her man. And there was a time, do you remember? before we were married, when you used to explain all your wonderful money-making schemes to me. And I thought that when we were married I would become part of your business interests, too. But you shut me out. You men are always shutting us women out. And so, when I saw you wouldn't discuss business with your wife, I just lost interest. Oh, and I've often thought since that if you'd trained me, I could be such a help to you.

JOHN: Afraid it's too late now, Baby. No, women can't understand.

BABY: Why, look at your shop. There's your secretary, Miss Hebblethwaite. Isn't she your right hand?

JOHN: Miss Hebblethwaite has got a man's brain.

BABY: But she wears a woman's skirts—and how horribly they hang! John, if you'd only taken the trouble, I might have been in her place. I might have been your right hand—instead of that scarecrow who wears wool underneath.

JOHN: Baby, I'm quite content with you as you are. And you really do help me. And to-morrow you'll help me by looking your nicest. The success of the ball depends on you.

BABY: A decorated figure-head! A nicely-dressed doll! That's all the use you've ever made of me.

JOHN: Well, here's your chance. I don't like this ill-feeling of Clibborn's. I want every person in the shop to be on good terms with me. I treat 'em all fairly enough. Now couldn't we conciliate Clibborn a little?

BABY: But you won't have him for a partner.

JOHN: No; that's business. But outside business we might flatter him a little. He feels it, I think, that you won't take up his wife. Why shouldn't you invite Mrs. Clibborn to-morrow?

BABY: But she is invited, with the rest of the employees.

JOHN: Oh, not as the wife of an employee; as a personal friend, as a member of your house party, to help you to receive your guests.

BABY: As a guest? That woman!

JOHN: She's the wife of my accountant.

BABY: She was a shop girl.

JOHN: My dear, did we start much higher up?

BABY: Mrs. Clibborn! A common thing like her?

JOHN: But we're common, too.

BABY: Yes, but we're successful. We're rich. Society simply had to take us up—though it took long enough about it. But I've snubbed that woman. She can come as the wife of an employee, or not at all.

JOHN: But surely if I ask you as a favor, Baby?

BABY: No, because this is business.

JOHN: Business?

BABY: Woman's business. Society is our business—the only business you let women run. Why, if I took that women up and attempted to foist her upon my society friends, they might drop me. And I've struggled too long and too desperately to get in to risk being dropped again. But—there, your breakfast is getting cold. Run away, you poor starving boy, and put on your coat. Lindsay said he'd be over this morning to help you with the arrangements.

JOHN: Then you won't invite Mrs. Clibborn?

BABY: No, dear. You don't understand. Unless, of course, you take Mr. Clibborn into partnership. Then my friends would recognise that I had to, and, in time, they might even take her up.

JOHN: There's only one partner that I'll ever take, and that's our son.

BABY: But you know Guy doesn't like the business.

JOHN: He will, when I'm done with him. This idea of mine of sending him to learn the whole business by starting from the bottom will make him quite capable of taking over the reins when I drop them. It's that that made me—my first-hand knowledge of every department. And the boy is getting on. Clibborn tells me that Guy has done very well in the accountant's office. In fact, he's got on so quickly that to-morrow I'm shifting him into the shop.

BABY: Into the shop? But what for?

JOHN: To learn how things are sold. That's the whole art of drapery—selling women things they don't want but must have. And the things they wouldn't on any account buy we label "bargains." So to-morrow morning our boy starts his brief career as a shop-walker.

BABY: Guy a shop-walker! Oh, John, surely that's not necessary. He won't like it.

JOHN: He doesn't like it. I told him yesterday.

BABY: Our boy a shop-walker! Oh, John, it isn't fair!

JOHN: He's got to go through three months of it before I send him to our buyer in London. It's disagreeable, I grant; but I was a shop-walker once—shop-walker and salesman and delivery van and the boy who sweeps out the shop.

BABY: I know, John. But now things are so different. I won't dare to be seen in the shop. Fancy Guy having to ask our society friends to step this way, madam! It's cruel to Guy, cruel to me.

JOHN: It's business. And he'll be in good hands. I've put him in charge of Maggs.

BABY: Oh, John, if he grows like Maggs!

JOHN: He's the most beautiful shop-walker that ever walked a shop.

BABY: But Guy as a shop-walker!

JOHN: It's business.

BABY: Of course! But you're forgetting your breakfast. Run away. Here's Guy. I want to speak to him.

JOHN: You want to spoil him some more, I suppose. I often wonder why women are entrusted with the bringing-up of children.

BABY: We provide them, dear.

(*With a gesture, recognising the hopelessness of argument with*

BABY, JOHN retires to his dressing-room.)

GUY DANGAR enters from the garden.

(He is a weak looking but harmless boy of 20, with a strong family likeness to his mother. He is well dressed in a lounge suit, and enters smoking a cigarette.

BABY: Well, Guy, what do you think of the marquee?

GUY: I hate it, mum, hate the whole thing.

BABY: But think of the advertisement for the shop.

GUY: Hate the shop.

BABY: But you're going to be a partner, and when John retires, you'll have sole control.

GUY: A draper! A rag-seller? I want to be a man. Have you heard the latest, mum? I've got to go into the shop—shop-walking. I told father I'd see him dead first.

BABY: But it's for your own good, Guy. You will?

GUY: If father says so, I suppose I must. But he knows I'm unfitted for the whole job. Why can't he let me chuck the whole thing and go out west? He wants me to spend my life selling hats and corsets and things. And out back there are horses to ride and cattle to round up, and—I'd love to go out back. Fancy a man having to sell women's stockings!

BABY: But you must go through with it, dear.

GUY: It's no work for a man, mum. Mum, I want you to do something for me. Where's father?

BABY: Eating a cold breakfast, I'm afraid. What's the trouble, child?

GUY: You've got to lend me two hundred pounds.

BABY: What on earth do you want with two hundred pounds?

GUY: I've——I've been betting.

BABY: Betting! Oh, Guy!

GUY: It was a sure thing—a dead cert—only the silly horse didn't start.

BABY: Surely if the horse didn't start you couldn't lose any money on it?

GUY: Fat lot you know about racing!

BABY: But, Guy, since your father increased your allowance you ought to have plenty of money, even for betting.

GUY: Oh, that! That wasn't enough.

BABY: Surely twelve pounds a week——?

GUY: That went quick enough. And, mum, I'm in a bad hole. I must have that two hundred by to-morrow.

BABY: To-morrow?

GUY: First thing.

BABY: Well, if you must, of course, I'll give you a cheque. Oh, no, I forgot. John says I'm badly overdrawn, and asked me not to pay anything for a week.

GUY: But, mum, it's serious. I simply must have it by to-morrow morning.

BABY: You'll have to tell your father. If it's so serious, he must see you through.

GUY: No; I couldn't ask father.

BABY: Why not?

GUY: Oh! He wouldn't stand my betting—and all that.

BABY: I see, dear. Well, I'll get it from him, somehow. He won't know what it's for. I'll tell it is for the last dresses I got—say that madame insists. I can't have you in trouble, child. But you must promise me you won't ever bet again—at least, only on horses that do start.

GUY: Get me that two hundred quid, and I'll never, never bet again. But father mustn't know.

BABY: I'll worm it out of him somehow, dear. I can't have you worried.

GUY: That's a good mum.

(*He kisses her, and goes out, whistling, watched anxiously by BABY.*)

BABY: I do wish John would let the boy go on the land. He's not safe here.

The BUTLER shows in a visitor.

BUTLER: I'll inform Mr. Dangar, sir, if you'll kindly wait here, sir.

ANTHONY CLIBBORN enters.

(*He is an oldish man, dressed carelessly. His face is lined and made bitter by ill-success. His manner is gruff and uncompromising.*)

(*BABY is surprised to see him.*)

BABY: Tony!

CLIBBORN: Good morning, Mrs. Dangar.

BABY: Mr. Clibborn, you! You said you'd never come here!

CLIBBORN: I didn't come to call, Mrs. Dangar. This is a business matter.

BABY: Business—on Sunday?

CLIBBORN: It won't wait.

BABY: About the shop?

CLIBBORN: About Mr. Guy.

BABY: Tony! Not *that?* That is done with—dead!

CLIBBORN: Oh, its nothing to do with *that.* We—we buried that. You needn't fear any resurrection, Mrs. Dangar.

BABY: But you said—? But, of course, it's about Guy's new position. He's to be a shop-walker to-morrow. Fancy Guy a shop-walker!

CLIBBORN: It is to settle what Mr. Guy is to be to-morrow.

BABY: But I'm interested. Surely you could tell me, his mother?

CLIBBORN: No; this is business—private business with my employer.

BABY: Always business. Oh, well, he'll be here in a minute.

The BUTLER returns.

BUTLER: Mr. Dangar isn't in the house, sir. I think he's just gone out into the garden to look over the marquee, sir.

CLIBBORN: I'll go to him, then. Excuse me, Mrs. Dangar.

CLIBBORN goes out.

The BUTLER, coming down to the door, is met by another visitor.

LINDSAY THONG comes in.

(*He is a man of middle age, carefully preserved and scrupulously dressed. Evidently a society man, and obviously, with his experienced air, attractive to women.*)

BABY: Lindsay! Mr. Clibborn's here!

THONG: Clibborn! Thought he never came here? But why?

BABY: I tried to find out. He wouldn't tell. No; Lindsay, it isn't *that!*

THONG: Nonsense. That? That's all done with—paid for.

BABY: Yes, it's been paid for. I've paid for it for over twenty years—every day of twenty years. I'm foolish to think—but the shock of seeing him actually here! I can't get away from the fear that——

THONG: Oh, it was some trifling business matter that couldn't wait till Monday.

BABY: Lindsay, I'm frightened. I know it's impossible, but still——

THONG: Now, Baby, you mustn't be a little silly. That secret is safe—safe with Clibborn and me. Why, we three are the only persons in the world who know that secret; and there isn't one of us who hasn't everything to lose by telling it. The past does not give up its dead. Life hurries on. Innumerable busy feet have trodden that little grave long ago level with the earth. What was it, after all? Clibborn was in love with you before you met John. And you, naturally, chose John. And then, after your marriage——

BABY: Oh, I was weak, horribly weak. But I never told you how it happened—what made it happen. I never excused myself to you. You didn't even ask me.

THONG: It wasn't my place to ask.

BABY: No; you were always too true a friend. You never even blamed me, I believe, even in thought.

THONG: Blame you? Blame you, Baby? You were young; you wanted love—and John neglected you. Well, these things happen.

BABY: But it needn't have happened. And yet—. When I married John I loved him, in the light way a young girl takes a man's love as her right, who takes all, and gives merely her beauty, her youth. Oh, I didn't know then that love means giving, giving everything, giving always. But I have learnt now; and the love that I have for John is a greater love, the real love. But after that first wonderful year, when John got absorbed and worried over those speculations of his, when he seemed to forget me, when I felt myself thrust out of his life, not wanted even to play with—and all my soul was aching to help him, even only to be asked to help him—I grew bitter. Oh, I don't blame him. His soul was in his business; he was more in love with his business than he ever was with me. It's that sort of soul—the business soul. Only I was young and passionate and spoilt; and in my loneliness I told myself that I was neglected, forgotten. And Tony was always there; he was John's partner then, you remember. Why, John used to send Tony with messages to say that he was detained in town on business night after night. He used even to scribble notes to me telling me he couldn't get home to dinner—dinners I had specially cooked for him—asking me to make Tony stay to dine, to take his place—in case I felt lonely! Lonely! And then——

THONG: The inevitable.

BABY: No; it needn't have been. But that man worked on my weakness. He never said anything that I could pin him down to; but he left the devilish suggestion that it wasn't business that kept John in town so often, that there was another woman, other women. And I was jealous. I didn't understand. I had been brought up on sentimental novels that told me that love was the only thing in the world. It may be for us women, but for men—oh, it's a big world, and women don't play much part in a man's world except for his relaxation. And so I was only too ready to believe. And how fatally easily I believed!

THONG: But it came out all right in the end. John never suspected. You saw your mistake—in time.

BABY: Yes: yes; I came to my senses—too late. And it was you who pulled me through. If it hadn't been for you, Lindsay——

THONG: I didn't do much. I guessed how things were going because—well, naturally I took an interest in you, Baby. I just dropped a hint.

BABY: You saved me, Lindsay.

THONG: You saved yourself. And it all ended; those few months of madness passed, and John never had a suspicion.

BABY: That has been my torture ever since. It's incredible that he's never guessed. I watch him and wonder—and wonder. You were wrong, Lindsay, wrong in not letting me confess. He might have for-

given me—in time, when I had paid in suffering; and then he would have taken me back, freely, forgiven. And the torture would have been ended, the debt for ever paid off. But now—now I am paying every hour. I must go on paying, paying!

THONG: Baby, you mustn't give way to these foolish fancies. I tell you John hasn't a suspicion. When a man's soul is given to business, he takes his wife on trust. And it isn't the "you" that you are now that went wrong twenty years ago. It was another "you," a passing phase of you. You've grown out of that phase. It is no more to you now than a passing fit of anger. That "you" is dead. Your boy——

BABY: Yes, my boy. Whenever I have goaded myself to tell, it has been that baby that closed my mouth with his pretty little innocent talk, his trusting eyes. Oh, Lindsay, why does God give children such innocent eyes?

THONG: What good would it have done? You couldn't have been so mad as to ruin John's life.

BABY: I couldn't ruin Guy's life.

THONG: Guy?

BABY: Lindsay, I can trust you. I never told.

(*She masters her impulse.*)

BABY: It was because I was a mother.

THONG: Well, it's all right now.

BABY: But Tony here—now—after all these years!

THONG: Only business.

BABY: But I'm frightened.

THONG: Well, to set your absurd fears at rest, I'll see Clibborn. Where is he?

BABY: Waiting for John in the garden.

THONG: I'll have a word with Clibborn before he—— He would never be so mad—— And yet, a bitter, disappointed man——!

(*BABY goes swiftly to the French window before him.*)

BABY: Tony's coming now—with John!

THONG: Steady, Baby! It's all right. It must be all right.

THONG and BABY go out, through the side door.

JOHN and CLIBBORN come in from the garden.

JOHN: All right, eh? That floor is perfect for dancing. Trust my wife for doing her share of it properly. It was decent of you to drop over and see it, Clibborn.

CLIBBORN: It wasn't for that. It's a matter of business. I couldn't mention it in the presence of the workmen down there.

JOHN: Business—on Sunday?

CLIBBORN: Too important to wait. I am sorry to say that I've discovered a serious discrepancy in my books.

JOHN: A theft? How much?

CLIBBORN: Two hundred pounds.

JOHN: Oh, I can stand that. I pay more than that every year for my wife's hats. Any clue to the thief?

CLIBBORN: It's only too plain.

JOHN: One of my employees? His name?

CLIBBORN: Guy Dangar.

JOHN: Guy? My son? Take care, Clibborn. This is not the time to joke.

CLIBBORN: It is the truth. I have ample proof.

JOHN: The proof, man, quick!

CLIBBORN: I'll show you at the office, to-morrow. I couldn't bring the ledgers here.

JOHN: Guy! Impossible!

CLIBBORN: It was easily enough found out. The boy didn't know enough to cover his tracks. I can't understand how he imagined he wouldn't be found out. Unless he meant to put it back to-morrow. I never thought of that. Yes, he might have escaped detection then. It just happened that I was looking over his work on Saturday afternoon; you know he's finished up in my office now to go into the shop. I like the boy and thought you would like a personal report from me as to how he has shaped. Um—if I had waited till next week, he could have put that two hundred pounds back, and I would never have known —at least never have been sure enough to accuse him. Mr. Guy had access to all the books and the safe—according to your instructions. I don't think you can blame me, Mr. Dangar.

JOHN: But what could he want with two hundred pounds?

CLIBBORN: That's what I can't make out. Though he's been spending a lot of money lately. I had a hint from Maggs that he'd been to the races rather often. Betting, I suppose. But then he had plenty of money of his own. I spoke to him about his expenses a fortnight ago, but he set my doubts at rest. Otherwise I would have spoken to you. That big increase in your private allowance to him surely gives him enough to gamble on racehorses.

JOHN: Increase in his allowance? What do you mean?

CLIBBORN: Didn't you increase his allowance? Haven't you been giving him an extra £12 a week since he came into my office?

JOHN: No. Twelve pounds a week!

CLIBBORN: He distinctly told me you were.

JOHN: Oh! His mother must have done it from her private account. She's so fond of the boy; denies him nothing.

CLIBBORN: He definitely told me that the increase came from you.

JOHN: You must be mistaken. The whole thing's absurd. Steal? My boy?

CLIBBORN: But my proofs? And this—this lie—about his allowance explains it all.

JOHN: Baby! We'll soon settle about his increase. And the—the other matter—will be as easily explained.

BABY DANGAR enters.

JOHN: Baby, have you been giving Guy an extra allowance? (*To CLIBBORN*) How much did you say?

CLIBBORN: Twelve pounds a week.

BABY: What is it, John?

JOHN: Did you give Guy any money lately; an increase in the allowance I made him?

BABY: Yes; I've been giving him twelve pounds a week. The boy needed it.

JOHN: For how long?

JOHN: Oh, two months or so. I can't really remember.

JOHN: How much has he had altogether?

BABY: I couldn't tell exactly.

JOHN: But your cheque-book. That would tell.

BABY: I—I didn't draw cheques, not specially for him. Just a lump sum, and I gave it to him in gold. He—he specially asked me for it in gold.

JOHN (*to CLIBBORN*): You see?

BABY: What is it, John, about Guy?

JOHN: Only a trifling business matter, Baby. Mr. Clibborn has made a mistake. It was necessary to trouble you to clear it up.

BABY: And it's all right now?

JOHN: Thanks to you, it is all right.

BABY: But you can tell me, John?

JOHN: No; it's just business.

BABY: Business! But surely his mother might help?

JOHN: You have helped. Now, run away, like a dear. My business with Mr. Clibborn will not take two minutes, and then we'll go and settle about the decorations.

BABY: I'm so glad it is all right about the—the allowance.

(*She goes out, slowly.*)

JOHN: So Guy's extra pocket-money is explained. And this preposterous charge of yours is another mare's nest.

CLIBBORN: That money of Mrs. Dangar's was paid in gold.

JOHN: Why not? Women don't like cheques.

CLIBBORN: No. Cheque-butts can always be looked up.

JOHN: You mean—? You have the damned impudence to suggest that Mrs. Dangar was not telling the truth?

CLIBBORN: Women don't always tell the truth. And she is his mother.

(*JOHN suddenly threatens him with a lifted fist.*)

CLIBBORN: Wait! Do you think truth matters tuppence to a mother when she is shielding her child?

JOHN: I'll kill you for that, Clibborn. Take it back, apologise, or——!

CLIBBORN: All right. She was speaking the truth. But still that doesn't explain away the fact that your son stole two hundred——

JOHN: Two hundred fiddlesticks! My boy isn't a thief.

CLIBBORN: Yet he lied to me about your allowance to him; and it came, as we've just seen, from Mrs. Dangar.

JOHN: Yes— But there I have only your bare word. You'll have to prove it.

CLIBBORN: I shall prove it in a court of law.

JOHN: What! You wouldn't dare.

CLIBBORN: And it may be necessary to subpoena your wife. I consider it is my duty to bring this theft before the police.

JOHN: Nonsense. Even if it were so—mind you, I'm not admitting it, not for one instant!—it is all in the firm—nobody's concern but mine. And—if the boy has been so foolish, I choose to overlook it. It shall go no further. I shall deal with my son myself.

CLIBBORN: But you're forgetting that I'm not in the firm.

JOHN: You are—unless you mean to leave?

CLIBBORN: I'm in the firm, as an employee. But once I was your partner.

JOHN: Oh, in that tuppeny-ha'penny business. Well?

CLIBBORN: If I were your partner now, I should see the advisability of overlooking this—mistake—for the sake of the firm.

JOHN: I see! Blackmail! You dare to bribe me!

CLIBBORN: If you put it in that crude way, yes.

JOHN: Then, I refuse to be bribed.

CLIBBORN: You—his father!

JOHN: I am more than that. I am the firm. I must consider the firm.

CLIBBORN: I must consider myself. You've got my terms. You refuse them. Then your son will have to prove his innocence before a jury.

JOHN: You'll lay an information?

CLIBBORN: It would be my duty.

JOHN: You couldn't do it. You're merely an employee.

CLIBBORN: I shall not be to-morrow.

JOHN: After all, Clibborn, you may be mistaken?

CLIBBORN: I don't make mistakes about money.

JOHN: But if to-morrow you find that you're mistaken about my son——

CLIBBORN: Yes?

JOHN: I shall increase your salary. I have had it in mind for some time—quite a considerable increase; or else retire you with a comfortable pension.

CLIBBORN: So you can bribe, too. But your bribe isn't big enough. My terms are a partnership, with full powers.

JOHN: Blackmail! Never.

CLIBBORN: Then your son will be arrested.

JOHN: By God, Clibborn, you'll have to prove it in black and white, before I——

CLIBBORN: I may lie. The books can't.

JOHN: Then you can go to Hell!

CLIBBORN: Yes, to Hell. But I'll take your son with me. Honestly, I hate to have to expose that boy; he's only a boy yet. I like him. You could make a fine chap of him—but not in the drapery business. But he has got in my way: I can't afford to consider anyone.

JOHN: Have your proofs ready at your office to-morrow morning. I'll examine this thing myself. Good-day.

CLIBBORN: Till to-morrow morning, then. Good-morning, Mr. Dangar.

ANTHONY CLIBBORN goes out.

JOHN: My boy! It's like a nightmare. No! But if—Baby! It'll break her heart. Baby!

BABY DANGAR comes in.

BABY: Did you call me, John?

JOHN: Did I? I don't know.

BABY: What is it about Guy? You must help him, John, stand by him. He's in trouble. He spoke to me just now. He made me promise to get him some money to-morrow. He must have it by to-morrow morning. John, he's been—a little foolish. He's only a boy yet. Betting. He lost some money. He must pay it back to-morrow.

JOHN: How much? How much?

BABY: Two hundred pounds.

JOHN: Two hundred!

BABY: John, you'll help him out, our son?

JOHN: I must wait till to-morrow.

BABY: You can tell me, his mother?

JOHN: You? No. This is a business matter.

BABY: You shut us out. Always you men shut us women out.

(*CURTAIN.*)

ACT TWO.

SCENE: *In the Underskirt Department in the shop of John Dangar and Co., an L-shaped counter runs along one side of the room and round the corner at the back. This counter ends to allow entrance to the next department, which is by an arched opening. At the back there is another archway, leading to a lift. Along the other side of the room runs an opaque glass partition, shutting off the offices from the shop. A door, situated in this partition, is marked "ACCOUNTANT—PRIVATE." Opposite the archway mentioned there is another. Behind the counter is a background of polished wood lockers, the doors of some of which are open, swinging downwards, allowing the contents of these lockers—piles of lingerie—to be disclosed. Above the lockers the walls are panelled with narrow mirrors. Near the middle of the floor there is arranged a group of shaped stands upon which underskirts and corsets are fitted. This group is so placed that it practically shuts off from view any customer occupied in the angle of the counter, from any person near the accountant's office. The room is lit by electricity. It is nine o'clock on the following morning. TOSSIE QUORK, a meek, pathetic-looking, pretty little salesgirl in elegant black, is engaged in shutting up the lockers behind the counter. This done, she comes out from behind the counter, with an underskirt in her hands, and drapes it round a shape in the centre. Then she stands off and rapturously admires it.*

TOSSIE: Wouldn't I just like one like you, you dear! You're heavenly!

(*She goes to the corset-stand and arranges a corset.*)

And you, you darling! Oh, to feel you round my waist! I do believe I'd rather have you than a man's arm.

(*Looking cautiously round to see that she is alone, she produces from the bosom of her dress a tiny button-hole bouquet.*)

I wonder if he will take it? Oh, if he only would! He takes buttonholes quick enough from that scraggy secretary, Eliza Hebblethwaite. And he can't see anything to admire in that scarecrow in specs. She's not pretty enough to be a salesgirl. All she can do is to type letters and walk through here as if she owned the shop. Stuck up thing. It's such a love of a buttonhole. It will become his darling frock coat. Oh, if he'd only let me pin it in!

(*She kisses it.*)

Here he is!

(*She hastily hides the flower in her dress and busies herself at the underskirt.*)

J. CHARTERIS MAGGS makes his imposing entrance.

(*He is the head shop-walker at Dangar's, a gorgeous and superb being. A man of 45, with the intimate knowledge of woman gained by a long and honorable career in shop-walking. He is quite satisfied with himself, and, not observing TOSSIE, strolls over and inspects himself in a mirror.*)

TOSSIE: Oh, good morning, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: Ah—um. Good morning, Miss Quork. Nothing doing this morning, of course, with this strike of tram guards on. I had to walk—actually walk—all the way from Bondi. There wasn't a single tram running.

TOSSIE: I bet there's not half-a-dozen customers in all day. My troubles whether this tram strike goes on for a week. You do look nice, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: For the credit of Dangar's I have to look—er—nice, Miss Quork.

TOSSIE: You know the whole shop is proud of you, Mr. Maggs. But it seems to me, if you'll pardon my presumption, that the effect is

a bit severe. Now, wouldn't a tricky little buttonhole relieve that beautiful frock coat?

MAGGS: Possibly, Miss Quork. But a perfect buttonhole is as rare as a perfect soup. I have never come across either. I selected three buttonholes this morning. I had to sacrifice them all. In my position a clashing buttonhole would be a catastrophe. And I'm not sure that Mr. Dangar would altogether like me to wear a flower in my coat. It might convey the impression to my clients that I took my profession lightly.

TOSSIE: Well, you wore one on Saturday, and the day before, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: Ah, those were dull, overcast days. They needed a touch of color. I supplied it. But a bright day like this? It seems an impertinence.

TOSSIE: You know Mr. Dangar never comes into the shop, and old Clibborn there, in his stuffy office, don't count. Mr. Dangar lets you do as you like. He knows that his whole business hangs on you.

MAGGS: I am proud to say that Mr. Dangar appreciates my value.

TOSSIE: I'd be so proud, Mr. Maggs, if you'd wear this.

(*She produces the flower, which MAGGS takes condescendingly.*)

MAGGS: A trifle gay, perhaps; but tasty, yes, tasty.

(*Holds it to his coat in front of the mirror and hands it back in silence.*)

TOSSIE: Oh!

MAGGS: You may pin it in.

TOSSIE: Oh, that's nice of you, Mr. Maggs.

(*Pins it in.*)

MAGGS: No trouble, I assure you, Miss Quork. Very thoughtful of you. Very loyal to the interests of the firm.

TOSSIE: The firm! What do I care for the rotten old firm. I did it for you.

MAGGS: It is a distinct improvement, Miss Quork.

TOSSIE: Indeed, Mr. Maggs, I don't think you need any improvement.

MAGGS: Naughty! Naughty! I say, Miss Quork, if you like you can call me Charteris. I prefer it to Maggs.

TOSSIE: I think Maggs is a most *distingey* name, Mr. Charteris. And—if you like, you can call me Tossie. My real name, of course, is Euphemia—Euphemia Titania Quork.

MAGGS: Quork! I don't like Quork.

TOSSIE: Oh, Quork don't really matter. That's only tempor'y.

MAGGS: Have you any particular preference for any other name, Tossie?

TOSSIE: I'm always trying in the directory. You know, you just open a page anywhere and put your finger on a name. But he's usually Macalister or Matthews; and he's always married. It's a funny thing, Mr. Charteris, but all the directories I've tried always open at "M."

(*She moves shyly away.*)

MAGGS: Tossie, I——

(*He puts out his arm to encircle her waist, without looking at her. But owing to TOSSIE having moved away, it is a corset-stand that he embraces. He discovers his mistake and steps briskly down after her, when—*)

MRS. GOODSIR enters from the lift.

(*She is a middle-aged lady of an almost skittish manner. TOSSIE hastily retreats behind her counter.*)

MAGGS: Your pleasure, madam?

MRS. GOODSIR: Good-morning, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: Good-morning, Mrs. Goodsir. Your pleasure this morning?

MRS. GOODSIR: Stockings.

MAGGS: Yes, madam. This way, madam, And how is Mr. Goodsir this morning?

MRS. GOODSIR: Livery, Mr. Maggs, livery. It's this dreadful tram strike.

MAGGS: Ah!

(Leaning over the back of a chair, and in his desire to be ingratiating almost embracing her.)

We all suffer, Mrs. Goodsir. If you only knew how I suffer myself. And it is so difficult for a man occupying my position. I have always to preserve an appearance of suavity with all my customers. Of course, with you, Mrs. Goodsir, it is a pleasure, a little ray of sunshine in my daily round.

(She beams.)

But some of my clients, madam! You can't guess how sensitive my soul is to a manner. Sometimes I'd give a week's salary just to—to explode, if you'll pardon me, Mrs. Goodsir. Of course, with Mr. Goodsir, it must be much easier. He needn't suffer in silence.

MRS. GOODSIR: He doesn't. This morning at breakfast—well, I just had to come straight out and buy a dozen pairs of stockings.

MAGGS: I can sympathise, madam. Breakfast is the breaking-point of matrimony. But fortunately we're showing some very smart things in stockings.

MRS. GOODSIR: Ah, yes, you're so entertaining, Mr. Maggs, that I was forgetting what I came for. This way, you said?

MAGGS: This way, madam.

(He waves her obsequiously out.)

MRS. GOODSIR: Thank you, Mr. Maggs. I really don't know what I would do without you. Good-morning.

MAGGS: A pleasure, Mrs. Goodsir, a real pleasure. Good-morning, madam.

MRS GOODSIR disappears.

TOSSIE *(who has been watching MAGGS'S demeanor with MRS. GOODSIR jealously)*: The way you do go on, Charteris, making love to every woman that comes into the shop!

MAGGS: I must, Tossie. They expect it. They demand it. They like it. And you mustn't forget, Tossie, that I'm paid for it. But my real love—ah, I keep that in a Thermos flask.

MRS. MEGGETT and MRS. CRONK arrive from the lift.

(MRS. MEGGETT is a tall thin woman, and MRS. CRONK a short and abundant one. From their dress it is evident that they are both from a cheap suburb, and that their husbands—if they have husbands—are clerks or small tradesmen.)

MAGGS: Your pleasure, madams?

MRS. CRONK: Underskirts.

MAGGS: Underskirts, madam, or under-underskirts?

MRS. CR.: The sort I want to see are under-under-underskirts.

MRS. M.: You know, the ones with——

MAGGS: I know madam. Blue.

MRS. CR.: Pink!

MAGGS: Pink ribbons, of course. More tricky. Suit you, madam. *(To TOSSIE)* Under-underskirts. *(To customers)* Take a seat, madams.

(TOSSIE goes to the end of the counter, to fetch samples.

MRS. MEGGETT and MRS. CRONK go up and sit in the angle of the counter.)

Delightful weather, isn't it, madams? Pity there's that tram strike, though. The idea of those tram-guards striking!

MRS. CR.: My brother-in-law is a tram conductor. What with the wages he's getting and his five children I say he's quite right to——

MAGGS: Quite right, madam. The way the tram conductors are ground down——

MRS. CR.: That's what I say.

MAGGS: Now this class of goods will just suit this weather. Though just now blue is being more worn.

MRS. CR.: I prefer pink.

MAGGS: Certainly, madam. We have all the new shades. And pink is so much more attractive by gaslight.

(*TOSSIE has returned with underskirts, which the customers examine. MAGGS moves away and titivates the underskirt on the stand.*)

MRS. CR.: No; I want something of a better quality.

MRS. M.: These look very common, don't they, Mrs. Cronk? I'm surprised at a shop like this selling these rags.

TOSSIE: Certainly, madam. I'll show you all the latest creations.

(*Going off, she meets MAGGS.*)

They don't look much, do they? Still you can't ever tell. They may be rich. I'll fetch the old guys something gaudy that'll get 'em all right. Better keep your eyes on 'em, though.

MAGGS: Kleptos.? No; not well enough dressed.

(*TOSSIE goes off.*)

MRS. CR.: What I like, Mrs. Meggett, at my time of life, and my tender feet, is a real good morning's shopping. Of course, I never buy anything. I always get my things from a cheaper shop. I believe in getting value for my money. But I do like to see the latest things. And these underskirts! I've never seen 'em on any of my friends, I'm thankful to say. I've never seen 'em anywhere but on the stage, and everybody seems to wear 'em on the stage, and they always let you know.

MRS. M.: I wouldn't be seen dead in 'em.

MRS. CR.: I can't see why any decent woman wants to wear these things. A shameful waste of good money I call it. Because what's the good of wearing expensive material like this when you can't show it to anybody but the washerwoman. And we do our own washing.

MRS. M.: If I had one of 'em on, I'd simply have to show it to somebody. And my poor husband's dead.

MRS. CR.: Disgraceful waste, I call it. If you want to wear lace like this, put it somewhere where your neighbors can see it.

MRS. M.: Oh, Mrs. Cronk, I wouldn't say that. I've got on a pair of openwork stockings—no; I can't show 'em to you till that man turns his back. And I always have my skirts made long and respectable; but do you know, I get quite a lot of pleasure out of the mere fact that I've got 'em on. Even though I'm a widow. How poor Absolem would have liked to see 'em, too!

MRS. CR.: My husband, Mrs. Meggett, prefers 'em plain. What a time that girl takes. 'Taint as if there'd be any other customers in here till the trams start running. But you'd think we had all the morning to waste.

MRS. M.: Well, so we have.

MRS. CR.: Yes, but that girl don't know it. Lazy, simpering, good-for-nothings, I call 'em.

(*She rises, and notices the corset-stand.*)

Are these the new corsets?

MAGGS: Yes, madam. Just a sample pair. The corset department is on the next floor. You take the lift, madam. Yes, madam, everybody is wearing them.

MRS M. (*who has followed MRS. CRONK down*): How do you know?

MAGGS: By the charming figure it gives, madam.

MRS. M.: Quite time, too, there was a new figure. There's far too many of these 'ips about. 'Ips are necessary, in reason, I grant you; but 'ips has had their day.

(*MAGGS is called to the lift by another customer, with whom he speaks, and then directs into the life again.*)

MRS. CR.: I don't agree with you, Mrs. Meggett. I thinks Hips are becoming and womanly. If these new corsets do away with Hips, you mark my solemn words, Mrs. Meggett, Hips will come back.

MRS. M.: It says here, Mrs. Cronk (*She takes a newspaper clipping from her bag*) in this advertisement which I cut from the morning's paper, it says here that we are to "banish the generously developed 'ip. We are to have the 'ip that's flat."

MRS. CR.: Well, I simply can't—and that's flat! If it comes to a question of Hips or unhappiness, my money goes on Hips.

MRS. M.: You might as well be dead as not in the fashion.

MRS. CR.: I'd rather be dead with my own Hips than be alive without 'em.

(*TOSSIE returns, laden with boxes.*)

TOSSIE: These are the latest importations, madam. Now this would just suit you, I'm sure.

(*The customers examine them minutely during the following scene.*)

GUY DANGAR enters through the archway.

(*He is frock-coated, ready for his apprenticeship to the shop-walking profession. He looks pale and worried.*)

MAGGS: Good-morning, Mr. Dangar. Mr. Dangar, Senior, has done me the great honor of putting you under my tuition, sir. And as there won't be any customers in this morning, owing to the tram strike, we can start now on the preliminaries, sir.

GUY: All right, Maggs. Fire away. I hate the whole show.

MAGGS: Hate shop-walking, Mr. Dangar? I hope you'll pardon me, sir, but you shock and pain me. Shop-walking is an exacting profession, sir. Not one man in a hundred is fit to shop-walk. In fact, sir, the shop-walker, as compared with the rest of humanity, is a sort of superman. You've read Nietzsche, sir?

GUY: Nietzsche? What's that? Sounds like a sneeze.

MAGGS: To humanity, sir, Nietzsche is a sneeze. A good, healthy, sneeze, sir, clearing the head. He is my favorite author, sir.

GUY: I say, Maggs, is Nietzsche necessary for shop-walking?

MAGGS: Nietzsche is necessary for everyone, sir. I get much comfort and encouragement from Nietzsche.

GUY: Well, get ahead. What have I to do first?

MAGGS: Don't run away with the idea, sir, that it's easy to shop-walk. The most difficult thing is to acquire a manner. Fortunately, sir, I was born with one. I claim no credit for it, sir. I was destined to be a shop-walker. Shop-walkers are born, not made. My father was a butcher: he is still a butcher. If Fate had not interposed, I should have been a butcher. But quite early in life I gave signs of my genius for shop-walking. It began with playing at keeping shops, with other children. Ever considered, sir, how fond children are of playing at keeping shops? It shows, sir, that the shop-walking instinct is implanted in the human race. Every child wants to shop-walk; but few manage to attain

their ambition. And when I played with other children, anybody could be behind the counter: I shop-walked. And as I grew up my imagination was fired by the sight of shop-walkers. I watched them at their profession, sir. I followed them reverently through the street. The crisis in my life came when one day I saw a shop-walker reeling home drunk. But the shop-walking temperament is invulnerable to Fate. Next day I peeped into the shop, and I saw my shop-walker genial and impassive again. It was a lesson to me, sir, a spur to my ambition. My father attempted to interest me in chops. He even sent me out with the cart, sir. But I found that a Manner is lost on a servant girl at the back door. No personal charm could prevail on a servant girl to order one extra chop. I tried it and failed. Henceforth I knew that butchering was not my forte. No doubt there are estimable butchers. My father is one. But butchering is merely a trade, sir; shop-walking is an art. I entered this shop as a shop-sweeper. Mr. Dangar divined my genius one morning when I was sweeping out and an early customer had come in. He promoted me on the spot. Since then I have never looked back, and now, you see, sir, I am at the top of my profession. You see, sir, you cannot suppress the shop-walking flair. My father is a small butcher; I am head shop-walker at Dangar's. Please God, my son, and my son's son, will be shop-walkers. I mean to establish a dynasty of shop-walkers. Generation after generation of Charteris Maggs will shop-walk down the centuries, until, perhaps, there will come the super-shop-walker that Nietzsche predicts.

GUY. To me it all seems bally rot. And as there don't seem anything useful for me to do just now, I'll run out and see a chap at the Australia.

(*He turns to go.*)

JOHN DANGAR enters.

JOHN: Ah, Guy, starting your new work? Maggs will put you through.

GUY: Morning, dad.

MAGGS: Good morning, sir.

TOSSIE (*who is behind the counter, to customers*): I'll show you another in that style, only cheaper, madam.

(*She goes out.*)

JOHN (*to MAGGS*): Is Mr. Clibborn in yet?

MAGGS: He's in his office, sir.

GUY: You're going to see the accountant, father?

JOHN: Just a little business matter.

GUY: But you always send for Clibborn.

JOHN: Oh, I want to examine the books.

GUY: The books!

JOHN: Yes, nothing important, my boy. It'll be all right. Don't go far away. I may want you.

GUY: Me?

JOHN: Yes.

(*JOHN DANGAR goes into the office.*)

GUY: I can't stop here while he's examining the books. But no; he can't have found out. (*To MAGGS*), I'll be back in ten minutes if the governor wants me.

(*He goes out.*)

MRS. CR.: I think, Mrs. Meggett, I'll make one like this for my little Araminta.

ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE enters.

(*She is a scraggy little woman of 29, clever, spectacled, mannish. She is JOHN DANGAR'S private secretary, and has an idea of her own importance. Judging by her straight raked sandy hair and her ill-fitting dress, she cares little for her appearance.*)

ELIZA: Good morning, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: Morning, Miss Hebblethwaite. It's a pleasure to see you here—a little ray of sunshine in the shop.

ELIZA (*producing a buttonhole bouquet*): I was wondering, Mr. Maggs, if you'd care to wear this. (*Seeing that he has already a flower in his coat*) Oh, I see I've come too late. And I took such care in making this up, for you.

MAGGS: Oh, this?

(*He sees that TOSSIE is not present.*)

Just a poor scraggy thing I stuck in anyhow. It is of no consequence, Miss Hebblethwaite.

(*He takes the flower out and drops it behind the corset-stand.*)

ELIZA: Oh, Mr. Maggs, that's so gallant of you!

MAGGS: A buttonhole picked by your fingers, Miss Hebblethwaite! You may pin it in.

ELIZA: It is a pleasure to meet a real gent. these days. Of course, you'll be at the ball to-night?

(*She pins it in.*)

MAGGS: It is my duty to the firm. But you——?

ELIZA: Oh, I just dote on dancing. I could waltz all night.

MAGGS: I thought, Miss Hebblethwaite, that an important official like you, the private secretary to the head of the firm, wouldn't care for such frivolity.

ELIZA: That's hardly nice of you, Mr. Maggs. Why shouldn't I care for frivolity? I'm a woman, aren't I?

MAGGS: A woman? Why, of course, certainly. Only it didn't occur to me that you——

ELIZA: Simply because I'm a good business woman, you imagined I don't frivol. Did you ever discover a woman who really cared for anything else than being a woman?

MAGGS: I have always looked on you, Miss Hebblethwaite, as being above that sort of thing.

ELIZA: Above waltzing! There's nothing above waltzing. You ask me for one to-night!

MAGGS: I will, my dear Miss Hebblethwaite. Two!

ELIZA: Oh, you flatter me, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: No trouble, I assure you. A pleasure.

TOSSIE enters, burdened with underskirts.

TOSSIE: There he is again, making love to that scrag in specs. Rabbit-face!

(*She flings down the underskirts angrily on the counter.*)

ELIZA: But, there, I'll have to run. I've got twenty letters to type.

(*Waving her hand coquettishly to MAGGS.*)

Till to-night, Charteris!

MAGGS: Till to-night, Eliza.

ELIZABETH goes out.

MAGGS: Let me see.

(*He makes a pencil note on his cuff.*)

One hundred and eighty pounds, plus £250—she must be getting two-fifty in her confidential position—makes £330 a year. A tidy little income to set up house on. And I know a nice little cottage in Mosman that we could get for thirty shillings a week.

MRS. CLIBBORN enters from the lift.

(*She is a young woman, frivolous and cheaply pretty.*)

MAGGS: Good-morning, Mrs. Clibborn. And what is your pleasure this morning?

MRS. CL.: I'm not shopping this morning. I just ran in to see my husband.

MAGGS: I'm afraid, Mrs. Clibborn, he's engaged with Mr. Dangar.

MRS. CL.: In there? But surely he can see his own wife?

MAGGS: I'll inquire, madam.

(*He knocks. The door is opened by ANTHONY CLIBBORN, who does not advance from the door of his office.*)

MAGGS goes off, shielding his new buttonhole from TOSSIE.

MRS. CL.: Tony, I must see you for a minute.

CLIBBORN: Sorry, dear, but I'm very busy.

MRS. CL.: Oh, that can wait.

CLIBBORN: With Mr. Dangar.

MRS. CLIB.: He can wait. It's about him I came. I want you to be sure to ask Mr. Dangar for an invite for the ball to-night.

CLIBBORN: But we've got invitations.

MRS. CLIB.: How stupid you are, Tony! We're invited as employees—just like the factory hands. We've got a right to go as guests —as Mrs. Dangar's friends, to be with her when she receives.

CLIBBORN: But you know that's impossible.

MRS. CLIB.: She's impossible. Always trying to snub me. But I'll get even with her yet. Mr. Dangar's got no false pride. He's an old friend of yours. You can easily worm an invite out of him.

CLIBBORN: I've got no claim on Dangar—now. Excuse me, I'm busy.

(*He shuts the door.*)

(*MRS. CLIBBORN waits a moment, nonplussed, then wanders away, and inspects the corsets.*)

BABY DANGAR arrives from the lift.

MRS. CLIB.: Good-morning, Mrs. Dangar. Delightful weather, isn't it?

BABY: Yes, delightful.

(*She sweeps past her to the office, and knocks.*)

MRS. CLIB.: She's only a shop-keeper's wife, anyhow.

MRS. CLIBBORN goes out.

(*The office door is opened by JOHN DANGAR.*)

BABY: You, John?

JOHN: Yes, Baby. What did you want me for?

BABY: I—I didn't want to see you. I came—er—to see Mr. Clibborn.

JOHN: Clibborn? What do you want to see him for?

BABY: It's for Guy. I must see Mr. Clibborn.

JOHN: Clibborn is engaged with me just now on important business. We are in the middle of our—our investigations. I can't possibly let him be called away now.

BABY: What is it, John? What are you doing to Guy? Surely you're not going to punish him for a trifling bet. No; there's something behind all this, something you're both keeping from me.

JOHN: It isn't—proved yet.

BABY: Proved?

JOHN: You must leave this matter to me, Baby. You can trust me to do the best for Guy. Now run away. I'll tell you all about it when—if there is anything to tell. By the way, if you see Guy, tell him I want to see him here at once.

BABY: Guy! What hateful, secret thing are you and that man in there doing to my boy? It's like a torture-chamber to me, and I must stand outside!

JOHN: Baby, you're beside yourself. I'm his father. I'll do all I can—in honor.

(*He retires to the office.*)

BABY: Honor! And they're torturing my boy!

GUY DANGAR comes in.

GUY: Mother, have you got that £200?

BABY: That'll be all right, dear. It's in your father's hands.

GUY: You told father?

BABY: I had to. Surely you can trust your father?

GUY: It's all up. Nothing can save me now.

BABY: But your father will pay it for you.

GUY: It's too late. They're in there, finding out. They know.

BABY: Know? Know what?

(*CLIBBORN appears at the office door.*)

CLIBBORN: Mr. Guy, your father wishes to see you here.

GUY: Mother, don't believe them. Promise you'll never believe them!

BABY: Guy, you're my boy. How could I ever believe anything against my little baby?

(*He follows Clibborn into the office.*)

LINDSAY THONG enters.

THONG: Baby, you here!

BABY: You've come to see Mr. Clibborn?

THONG: I've come to find out, to set your foolish doubts at rest.

BABY: Lindsay, you're too late. He's in there now, with Guy and John.

THONG: With his father? Then he'll be all right.

BABY: Guy's done something bad. I don't know what. No, Lindsay, it isn't that. I'm sure it isn't that. It's nothing to do with me. But I'm afraid that Tony will tell, and then—— Oh, my poor boy!

THONG: It's only business. And even if it wasn't Clibborn's no fool. He has nothing to gain by raking up the past, and everything to lose.

MRS CLIBBORN returns.

MRS. CLIBB.: What charming things you have in your shop, Mrs. Dangar?

BABY: I'm glad you found what you want. Good-morning.

(*She turns deliberately to THONG.*)

MRS. CL.: Good-morning, Mrs. Dangar. I'm sorry I won't be able to get to a dance you're giving, I understand, to your employees this evening. An unfortunate prior engagement. Good-morning.

(*She sweeps out.*)

BABY: I don't think that woman will cringe to me any more. She sees it's no use.

THONG (*noticing TOSSIE, who has come out from her counter*): I say, Baby, what a pretty girl!

BABY: Now, Lindsay, no philandering with our sales-girls! I won't have it. You must go for that sort of amusement to another shop.

THONG: Still, she is a pretty girl. That reminds me. I promised a friend I'd buy him some—some things.

BABY: Not underskirts, surely?

THONG: I'm not sure they weren't underskirts. I'll have a look at 'em anyway.

BABY: My dear man, if you're contemplating buying underskirts, you've let yourself in. These things cost fortunes.

THONG (*fingering the edge of the underskirt on the stand*) : Flimsy things like this?

BABY: Yes, you pay for the holes in them.

THONG: Still, they seem worth inspecting.

BABY: Remember, no philandering.

THONG: My dear lady, could a man philander amongst these things? They give the whole show away.

(*He strolls across and speaks to TOSSIE. After a few words she shows him out, and follows him, leaving the two customers still engaged in discussing underskirts.*)

GUY appears from the office.

(*He is pale and distressed.*)

GUY: Mother, they've found out!

BABY: Found out—about you?

GUY: Yes, that I stole that money.

BABY: Oh, only that?

GUY: That! Mother, can't you understand? I took the money—the two hundred I told you about. I didn't mean to keep it. I—I just borrowed it. I told you father had given me a thumping allowance. That's a lie. He never gave me a penny extra. And I needed money. I go about with chaps who've got hundreds a year of their own. So I got into the hands of money-lenders. Then betting. It seemed so easy. And then—I was in the office, handling all the money, and it seemed a sure thing to borrow two hundred and put it on a horse. But I meant to pay it back. Only the horse never started. And then that suspicious beggar, Clibborn, got grubbing away at the books on Saturday afternoon, and discovered it. I could have fixed it all up and nobody would have known if you had got me the money. That was why Clibborn came to our place yesterday—to tell father. And now father is going to send me to gaol.

BABY: To gaol? Your father!

GUY: He isn't a father. When it's business he's a firm.

BABY: But, my boy, that's impossible. John couldn't disgrace his name.

GUY: Oh, if he had only himself to consider, he'd hush it up quick enough—for the sake of the firm. But it's that brute, Clibborn; he's got some sort of pull on father.

BABY: Clibborn accuses you? Clibborn?

GUY: Yes, it's all him.

BABY: I'll talk to John. He spoke to you like that before Mr. Clibborn, just to impress him, perhaps to make it a lesson to you. But he won't do anything so outrageous.

GUY: Mother, it's no use pleading with father. He's helpless. He'd let me off; but he can't. It's Clibborn.

BABY: Clibborn!

GUY: He knows something——

BABY: Impossible! What could he know?

GUY: He's holding something over father. Mother, get me out of this. I've been a fool; but if only I get away from all this—send me out on to the land, away from all these rags, and I'll never be a fool again. Mother, there's only one way: you must see Clibborn.

BABY: Clibborn!

GUY: He's bitter against father for something. He really likes me, and I like him, in spite of his gruff ways; but he's got to use me to strike father with.

BABY: Clibborn!

GUY: Mother, you know him. You used to be friends with him. You could appeal to him.

BABY: Appeal to Mr. Clibborn! No, I couldn't do that.

GUY: You think Mrs. Clibborn beneath you. I know you snub her. But give me this one chance to go straight.

BABY: Plead to Mr. Clibborn!

TOSSIE and THONG re-appear.

BABY: You're my boy. I'll save you, dear. I'll humble myself to that man. I'll—I'll die for you.

(*Seeing LINDSAY THONG, who is obviously impressed with TOSSIE.*)

Lindsay!

(*THONG takes no notice.*)

It'll be all right, Guy, by to-night. You're my boy, only my little baby that's been naughty, and you belong to me, only to me, and trouble shan't touch you. Once I was all to you; but when boys grow up the world thrusts their mothers aside. We see you grow away from us; you have no need for our useless love. And then you get into some little trouble—and we mothers almost thank God for it, for it brings you back to us, and you creep to our knees just as you used to do when you were a helpless little child. And oh, how glad we are just to put our arms around you and shield you from hurt!

GUY: Mother, you won't do anything wrong? You won't put yourself in any danger?

BABY: Danger? No, no! But if there were, I'd save you.

GUY: But if it depends on you humiliating yourself to Clibborn, I'll take my gruel. They can't give me very long, can they?

BABY: My boy, my own boy!

(*She turns with him, her arm round him, comforting him.*)

THONG: I shall see you at the dance to-night, Tossie?

TOSSIE: Oh, yes, sir. But you mustn't ask me for a dance.

THONG: Why not?

TOSSIE: Gents don't ask a shop-girl to dance with them.

THONG: Oh, don't they, when a girl is as pretty as you? I say, Tossie, do you get any commission on the sales you make?

TOSSIE: Oh, yes, sir. We get our spiffs.

THONG: They go to you—not to that gorgeous bounder who bows you in?

TOSSIE: Yes, to me.

THONG: I'll take this, and this, and this.

(*He grabs three underskirts haphazardly.*)

TOSSIE: Oh, thank you, sir. Where shall I send them?

THONG: Lindsay Thong, Macleay-street. See you at the dance to-night, Tossie. Till then. Hallo, Guy!

(*BABY sends him a glance of appeal.*)

I say, Guy, if you're not too busy asking females to step this way, madam, what about a round before lunch? I'll give you seven holes.

BABY: Yes do, Guy. It'll do you good. I'll tell John I've given you a holiday. It'll be all right by to-night, dear.

GUY: Right, Lindsay.

GUY and THONG go out.

(*BABY watches them off, and comes slowly down to the office door, hesitating whether she will knock.*)

TOSSIE: Lindsay Thong! That bad man! Oh, and I did think him such a nice gent.! But I can't dance with him. Everybody knows how he looks upon girls like us. (*To her customers*) Now, this one looks just sweet. And, considering the quality, it's quite absurdly cheap, isn't it?

MRS. CR.: No; I can't say I exactly like any of these. Haven't you got any newer models?

(*BABY knocks at the office door and waits.*)

TOSSIE (*surrounded by now with towering piles of underwear*): We've got hundreds of other models; but we can't keep them all in this showroom. In the next department, madam, if you'll kindly come this way.

(*Leads the way down.*)

MRS. MEG.: We'd better see them, if it's not too much trouble. (*To MRS. CRONK*), It's quite early yet. I do enjoy a good morning's shopping, don't you?

(*They follow TOSSIE out.*)

JOHN DANGAR comes from the office.

JOHN: You've seen Guy?

BABY: Oh, it can't be true!

JOHN: I thought it impossible, too.

BABY: But you'll hush it up. You can't let the boy suffer for this —this childish fault? He's not grown up yet.

JOHN: I am helpless, Baby.

BABY: You, the firm, his father?

JOHN: You don't understand these things. Clibborn knows.

BABY: Knows? Knows what?

JOHN: That Guy is—I can scarcely say it——

BABY: Is what?

JOHN: A thief.

BABY: Oh, that!

JOHN: Isn't that enough? Can't you women see the seriousness of anything?

BABY: A mere slip, John.

JOHN: I can't regard it that way. But for Guy's sake I would overlook it—if it wasn't for Clibborn.

BABY: Always that man!

JOHN: He's got me in his power. I've tried all I know to prevent him making this public. Legally he has no case. I'm his employer; he's merely my agent. But he swears he'll make this affair public somehow. He'll set a rumor going that will be most damaging to the firm—and to Guy. How could Guy take my place when it is known through the whole shop that he was a thief? I've pleaded to Clibborn, I've threatened him. He refuses.

BABY: Unconditionally? He must be mad.

JOHN: There is one condition.

BABY: I knew there was a way out. Then it is easy. All you have to do is to accept his condition.

JOHN: Unfortunately, that is just what I cannot do.

BABY: But to save our boy?

JOHN: I cannot save Guy at the sacrifice of my honor—at the sacrifice of the firm. His condition is nothing but blackmail—a dirty bribe.

BABY: Then pay his blackmail, take his bribe.

JOHN: Baby, you don't understand. All my life I have tried to go straight as a business man. If now I gave way to this temptation—and God knows it's hard enough to resist—I'd be as weak as Guy. I would forfeit my self-respect; I would forfeit your respect.

BABY: You wouldn't forfeit my love.

JOHN: I will save him in any way that is not dishonorable. But not that way.

BABY: Oh, you business men! You make a cruel, bitter god of business. I'm only a woman; but I'd save my son, any way. I'd save him by a lie, by any conceivable sort of meanness, by the disclosure of any damning secret, by a crime—only I'd save him.

JOHN: You don't understand, Baby. I'm not blaming you, but yesterday you told me and Clibborn a lie about Guy's allowance. I can forgive you, because you're his mother. There was no other way —for a woman. But for a man——

BABY: What is Clibborn's blackmail?

JOHN: A full partnership in the firm.

BABY: Only that?

JOHN: Blackmail.

BABY: But it will save Guy.

JOHN: By a bribe!

BABY: You men!

JOHN: Women! Women! Baby, I love you, but how can I respect you? Your sex is only half civilised. We men have made this world; we men have built up a code of honor in this world, so that man can live with man. But you are outside this world, outside this code of honor, outside the clean, fine machinery of civilised life. You women are the pretty parasites of the world, admitted to our homes as we admit our cats, because you're graceful and faithful and weak, and need protection. We love you, we take you, we dress and adorn you, we give you half our possessions, we entrust you with the training of our children, we build cities for you—a city is only a row of shops, and shops are only for women. These miles and miles of plate glass—miles of illusion for women. We spend our money on necessities, and fling the rest to you to waste on useless things. Why, as you stand before me now, you are only a collection of tawdry adornments. This and this and this—fripperies, bangles, rags! There isn't one bit of your clothing, for all you pay for it, as useful as the clothes of a navvy. There is not one of your rags that will protect you from the wind or the sun or the rain. Why, if you were left exposed to the rain for an hour, this beautiful, dainty thing would be nothing but a draggled sop. Your hats—do they protect your heads? Your shoes—do they support your feet? Your dress—does it cover you? No; you produce nothing, you spend everything; you do nothing, you waste everything. You're parasites, useless parasites upon men. Women! Women! Parasites, inefficients, wasters, wasters!

BABY: My dear John, we may be useless, but what are you? Where would you be if it wasn't for us? We may be parasites, but you have made us parasites. We may be wasters, but you prey on us.

JOHN: I didn't make the world. I merely made use of it.

BABY: You men! You've got your pretty little codes, your precious honor, the god you call business. You pet us and despise us; you love us like equals and treat us like children. Who made woman a parasite? You, who wanted a parasite. You are the wasters, for you have wasted our womanhood. You do not know the sympathy and kindness we could have brought into your harsh business world. Teach us, train us, and we will pay you back in something finer than mere love. Why, what employer would deliberately allow half his employees to be left untrained? We are made for bigger things than love. When I married you, I wanted nothing so much as to be part of your business, for that would have been part of you. And I could have helped you, but you sent me back to my fripperies. I asked you for companionship: you gave me a new hat.

JOHN: Because you could not help. Why, what could you do now to save Guy except lie?

BABY: I could save him now.

JOHN: You talk like this at this moment when Clibborn is in there

preparing his proofs. At any moment he will open that door and pass out to ruin Guy. I can't prevent him. I've tried everything possible to a man.

BABY: Then let me try everything possible to a woman.

JOHN: More lies?

BABY: No. It may be worse than a lie. It may be the truth.

JOHN: Baby, what secret is it you keep from me? What secret that makes you cry out in your sleep?

BABY: Do I cry out? What do I say?

JOHN: I cannot make out. But sometimes I hear you moan. You are in some trouble. But I never dared to speak of it.

BABY: Dreams, only absurd dreams. But that man in there. He must be stopped. He must never come out of that door. He must be silenced.

JOHN: Baby, I'm done. I'm beaten. Help me.

BABY: I can silence him. Wait here. I must see him alone.

(*As she is going to the office John interposes.*)

JOHN: What are you going to do?

BABY: Tell him——

JOHN: Tell him what? What have you to tell him?

BABY: John, I can stop him.

JOHN: No; I forbid you.

BABY: This is my affair. You have failed. You refuse to sacrifice yourself. I, his mother, must.

JOHN: No. What hold have you over Clibborn that I have not? By God, Baby, what have you to do with that man?

BABY: Let me see him, before it's too late.

JOHN: Baby, I—I don't trust you. You have lied to me. What lie are you going to tell Clibborn?

BABY: I am going to tell him something that neither he nor you know. Something that will change our lives for ever.

(*She tries to reach the door, but JOHN stands with his back to it.*)

Oh, well, since you refuse—

(*She turns away hopeless, then suddenly pauses, struck with a new thought.*)

Yes!

(*Lightly, controlling her agitation.*)

What an idiot I was! It really isn't at all necessary for me to see Clibborn. I shall see his wife.

JOHN: See his wife? What good will that do?

BABY: John, you must see Mr. Cilbborn. Tell him to wait till to-morrow. Tell him I am trying to persuade you to give him his partnership.

JOHN: You know that's impossible.

BABY: I know. But we must have a day. Put him off—oh, on any pretext. Keep him silent for a day. Ask him—if you like, ask him for my sake, to wait a day.

JOHN: What good will it do?

BABY: Listen. This afternoon I shall call on Mrs. Clibborn.

JOHN: Call? What foolery is this?

BABY: You men are just stupid babies. You never thought of the way out. It's the simplest thing in the world—to a woman.

JOHN: Pay an afternoon call.

BABY: I shall ask her to come to the ball—as my personal friend. That man, of whom you're so afraid, adores his foolish wife. She can make him do what she likes. Her one ambition is to get into

society. She can do that only through me. If I personally invite her to be one of my house-party to-night, her name will appear in the society columns. Sydney will know that I have taken her up. She will have realised her life's ambition—and what husband can stand against his wife's ambition? She will come to-night, and bring her husband. And if he comes his mouth will be for ever shut.

JOHN: You mean to say that a mere invitation will stop him?

BABY: Of course! Any woman could have told you that. But you big, stupid babies never think of consulting us. There is always one way out of every difficulty, and that is the woman's way.

JOHN: The woman's way! An invitation to a dance!

BABY: You've failed, for all your man's wits?

JOHN: Yes.

BABY: Have you any other clever schemes to try?

JOHN: No.

BABY: Then let me try. To-night you'll see her and her husband at our dance—gagged.

JOHN: He won't come.

BABY: He will.

JOHN: Ah, Baby, if you're right! If you only could! To save Guy—with honor! No; it won't work.

BABY: Wait till to-night. And that reminds me. I must go home at once and put on my smartest dress. I must impress Mrs. Clibborn, and the only way to impress a woman is to be better dressed. You'll persuade Clibborn to give me time?

JOHN: Yes; I can promise that.

BABY: I think I shall wear my fawn. Don't you think I look my smartest in my fawn, with my new model hat?

(*She goes out.*)

(*JOHN sees her into the lift, then comes down, pauses a moment to collect himself, then enters the office.*)

MRS. MEGGETT, MRS. CRONK, and TOSSIE return.

(*TOSSIE is loaded up with more underskirts and looks quite worn out.*)

MRS. CR.: Really, I can't decide whether I like this pink one or this heliotrope.

MRS. M.: This rose du barry looks smartest to me.

MRS. CR.: Yes, it does look sweet, now I look at it again. It is really so difficult to decide.

MRS. M.: Why, it's past twelve, I do declare.

MRS. CR.: Past twelve! And I've got to get home to get the lunch for the children. How the time has flown! I think, after all, I'll take this one.

TOSSIE: It will become you beautifully, madam.

MRS. CR.: Oh, I'm not choosing it for myself. And really, now I come to think, I fancy I like this one best, after all. But perhaps I'd better not decide to-day. You see, I'm choosing it for my aunt.

TOSSIE: Your aunt! Oh!

MRS. CR.: Yes, and she's that crotchety and difficult to suit, you know. I think it would be more satisfactory if I brought her along and let her pick one out for herself.

TOSSIE: We would change it, madam, if you sent it home and it didn't suit.

MRS. CR.: No, you don't know my aunt. And it's lucky you don't. She flies into such tempers—with her bad back, you know. No; I'll wait till some fine day when this tram strike is over and the old lady is able to get about, and bring her along, and let her see all these and

choose for herself. After all, she's got to wear it, you know. Thank you so much, miss. Good-morning.

(*She rises and comes down with MRS. MEGGETT*).

We've had such an exciting morning, Mrs. Meggett, haven't we? Why, I've got quite an appetite.

TOSSIE: Shall I put these two by for you, madam?

MRS. CR.: Oh no, please don't trouble. I couldn't think of troubling you, miss.

TOSSIE: Anything else this morning, madam?

MRS. CR.: Let me see. Ah, yes, I do want something—a hair pad. Baby ate mine yesterday.

TOSSIE: Hair pads! They're on the third floor, madam. You take the lift.

MRS. CR.: Thank you so much. Pads are such indigestible things for babies.

MRS. M. (*attracted once more by the corset-stand*): How any decent woman, let alone a widow, could be seen dead in one of these shameful things beats me.

MRS. CR. (*leading her away, to TOSSIE*): Good-morning.

MRS. M.: Good-morning!

(*They go out.*)

TOSSIE: Good—— Damn! Buns! Mrs. Neverbuy! I knew 'em. All my morning wasted, and not a sale. Her aunt! She hasn't got an aunt. Not a spiff for all my work. And all these things to put back!

MAGGS returns.

MAGGS: Any sales, Tossie?

TOSSIE: Buns!

MAGGS: I feared so. Well, see you at the ball, Tossie.

(*He goes out.*)

TOSSIE: He's wearing somebody else's buttonhole! My Charteris! My Maggs! Oh!

(*Hysterically she sweeps the boxes and underskirts off the counter, comes excitedly out from behind the counter, knocks over the corset-stand, tears the underskirts from their stands, and suddenly pauses in her frenzied rush. She has discovered the buttonhole she gave MAGGS, lying discarded on the floor. She picks it up, dazed.*)

My buttonhole! On the floor! Flung down, thrown away! And he's flaunting some other girls. That rabbit-face of a secretary, likely as not. Oh, I *will* dance with that wicked Mr. Thong to-night! I'll—I'll sit out with him—in the dark! I'll——

(*Laughing hysterically.*)

I'm going to have hysterics. I know I'll have 'em! I don't care. Nobody cares. I will have 'em! I will!

(*Breaking into hysterical tears and losing all control of herself.*)

Ha-ha-ha!

(*She completes the ruin of the room by knocking over the remaining stands, and collapses weakly, sobbing, on top of the bundles of lingerie and cardboard boxes on the floor.*)

(*CURTAIN.*)

ACT THREE.

SCENE: *It is evening, and the reception hall at "Ulladulla" is decorated for the ball. The French windows are open, and outside is the intense blue of Australian moonlight. The music of a waltz, evidently played in the marquee on the lawn, is heard.*

BABY DANGAR and JOHN DANGAR are seen standing awaitng the arrival of their guests. BABY has just shaken the hands of two ladies, and as they go off through the French windows, she faces round to receive the next arrival. Behind her are standing two ladies, stylishly gowned, members of her house party, chatting to each other.

The BUTLER waits at attention at the entrance.
For a moment there is no one to announce.

JOHN: It's very late. The Clibborns can't be coming.

BABY: They will. Mrs. Clibborn assured me this afternoon that she would be delighted to come, and bring her husband.

JOHN: But they're not here. And it's long after nine.

BUTLER: Miss Hebblethwaite. Mr. J. Charteris Maggs.

ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE and MAGGS arrive.

BABY: Good-evening, Miss Hebblethwaite. So pleased to see you. And you, Mr. Maggs.

MAGGS: Your pleasure, madam? I mean, it is a great pleasure, madam.

BABY: The dancing is in the marquee, on the lawn, through there.

(*ELIZABETH and MAGGS pass out.*)

BABY: Here they are at last! No; it's only Lindsay.

LINDSAY THONG arrives.

BABY: You're very late, you bad boy.

THONG: Sorry, Baby. The usual trouble—studs.

JOHN: You ought to marry, Thong. A wife's invaluable—for putting in studs.

BABY: I think Lindsay has a higher ideal of woman than that.

THONG: I've no ideals about women. I'm only too grateful to Providence for letting us have 'em at all. (*To LADIES behind BABY*) Ah, good-evening. I hope you have kept a dance for me?

BUTLER: Miss Euphemia Titania Quork.

TOSSIE QUORK enters.

BABY: Good-evening, Miss Quork.

THONG: Hullo, Miss Quork. Been waiting for you for hours.

TOSSIE: Oh, Mr. Thong, how could you say such a thing!

THONG: I could say worse things than that. I wonder if you're engaged for this waltz? Come on, or we'll miss it.

TOSSIE: Oh, Mr. Thong!

(*He escorts her out.*)

JOHN: They're not coming. They won't come.

BABY: They must come. You should have seen Mrs. Clibborn's face light up when I invited her. But they're very late. Oh, John, if—if they don't come, and Guy——? No; they'll be here. She's not the sort to have an evening dress ready. She's fixing up something as like the description of my last ball dress as she can manage.

JOHN: I know Clibborn. They won't come.

BABY: They will. I know Mrs. Clibborn.

BUTLER: Mr. Anthony Clibborn.

BABY: There! I told you.

JOHN: But his wife? She's not with him.

ANTHONY CLIBBORN enters.

BABY: Poof! It doesn't matter about her. The main thing is we've hooked *him*. Good-evening, Mr. Clibborn. So delighted.

CLIBBORN: Good-evening. Sorry I'm late.

BABY: And Mrs. Clibborn?

CLIBBORN: I must make her apologies, Mrs. Dangar. She has a bad headache.

BABY: Oh, and I had counted on her to make up my party. I'm so sorry. Please tell her I hope she'll be better to-morrow. I want to take her calling with me.

CLIBBORN: I'm afraid, Mrs. Dangar, it is the sort of headache that lasts three days.

BABY: Then I'll call to-morrow and see how she is.

CLIBBORN: I'm afraid she'll be in bed. She won't be able to see you.

BABY: Oh! But I'm keeping you from the dance. Let me introduce you to my friends. Mrs. Weston, Miss Qualthough, let me introduce to you John's right hand in business, and one of our oldest friends, Mr. Clibborn. I want you to do me a favour, Mr. Clibborn. I'm keeping my friends from their partners. Won't you please take them to the marquee?

CLIBBORN: Certainly, Mrs. Dangar.

(*CLIBBORN takes the ladies out.*)

JOHN: Him, and not her!

BABY: I can't understand it. She's got no headache, of course. There isn't any room in her head for an ache. It's a heartache, because she hasn't got a new dress.

JOHN: But why did *he* come?

BABY: Oh, John, if I've failed!

JOHN: Where's Guy?

BABY: He's gone out. The poor boy simply couldn't dance to-night. But Mr. Clibborn here, and not his wife. He must have locked her up. But why did he come—and with that look on his face. I'm horribly afraid.

JOHN: Baby, it'll be all right. He wouldn't have come unless he was going to give way. Well, I'll find out to-night. But come, we mustn't let anyone see we're worried. Come to the marquee.

(*They go out.*)

THONG and TOSSIE enter from the side door.

TOSSIE (*leading the way, as if escaping from him*): In here, please, Mr. Thong.

THONG: But why not in there?

TOSSIE: It's too lonely in there.

THONG: Well, there's nobody here, either.

TOSSIE: But lots of people will be passing through. And there's more light here.

THONG: But we don't want a crowd and illuminations.

TOSSIE: I do.

THONG: But why?

TOSSIE: Because you're Mr. Thong.

THONG: Oh, that's it?

(*He sits beside her.*)

I'm not to be trusted.

TOSSIE: I trust you. I'm sitting out with you. But I've heard all about you. You're a bad man, a wicked man.

THONG: Fancy you guessing that! Of course, I'm bad. No unmarried man is a saint after forty. When that recording angel up there totals up the items in my life, I'm afraid he won't find much except clean blank pages on the credit side. And the debit side! He'll have to use a card index cabinet and a staff of stenographers.

TOSSIE: Mr. Thong, why don't you try to put a few good actions to balance the—the others—to balance that affair of Milly Sullivan's, for instance?

THONG: So you know about that? Well, I just can't help it. Made that way, I suppose, Tossie.

TOSSIE: Oh, you can't be all bad, Mr. Thong.

THONG: Too late to start growing wings now. Look at the long list of previous convictions.

TOSSIE: The recording angel doesn't add up like that. One little good action would wipe off ten pages of bad ones.

THONG: But he'd have to write off a whole library.

TOSSIE: I simply can't believe you all bad—with those eyes.

THONG: It's these confounded eyes that get me into all the trouble. Women look in 'em—just as you're looking into 'em, Tossie—and that reminds me. You can't be getting much of a living wage at the shop. Not much left over to spend on dresses and new hats, eh? This frock——

TOSSIE: Oh, you *do* think it smart, don't you?

THONG: Very pretty—not as pretty as the wearer.

TOSSIE: I made it myself—copied one of our latest models.

THONG: But it's cheap, eh?

TOSSIE: Oh, don't say it looks cheap!

THONG: Only to me, dear. Remember, I'm a connoisseur in women's dresses. I know what they cost. Had to pay for too many of 'em. But not many men could tell that that lace is imitation—cheap imitation, too.

TOSSIE: Yes, but every woman knows. They're dreadful—women's eyes—when they price your gown. I think Hell must be a place where every other women is better dressed—and looks you up and down. And Charteris knows, too.

THONG: Who the deuce is Charteris.

TOSSIE: Mr. Maggs—the head shop-walker.

THONG: This way, madam? And he loves you?

TOSSIE: N—n—no. He's dancing this very dance with that scraggy cat of a secretary. I'm so glad he saw me dancing with you. That's why I brought you in through the drawing-room. I made him see me. But Eliza Hebblethwaite was wearing a real aigrette!

THONG: Abandoned Eliza! But, you know, you can have one, too. You can have a dozen.

TOSSIE: Oh, no. I couldn't take anything from you.

THONG: You will. And a real dress—and all those expensive underthings I let myself in for this morning. You didn't guess that I was buying that little lot for you, did you, dear?

TOSSIE: Oh, Mr. Thong!

THONG: I didn't know it, either—till I saw how nice you look to-night.

TOSSIE: No, I couldn't take them—from you.

THONG: Nonsense, Tossie. You must be well dressed when I take you out to supper in town.

TOSSIE: Please, Mr. Thong, don't say things like that. I'm a good girl.

THONG: I'd look after you and give you a real good time—better than wearing out your prettiness behind a woman's counter. I'll set you up in a nice little house of your own. I'll——

TOSSIE (*facing him, simply*): Mr. Thong, are you asking me to marry you?

THONG: Marry?—— Well, not at present. Afterwards, if I liked you very much—— Anyhow, we'll see.

TOSSIE: Then you *are* bad.

(*Turning to go.*)

Mr. Thong, I won't listen to you.

THONG: Oh, yes, dear, you will.

(*He catches her and kisses her.*)

TOSSIE: How dare you! Leave me go! Leave me go!

THONG: Steady! Don't be a little fool. Every girl goes on like this at first.

TOSSIE: Leave me go, or I'll scream.

THONG: No, you won't. You don't want anybody to come here and find you in my arms. Tossie, listen to reason. I love you. I want you. You like me; you can't deny that you like me. I'll be good to you. I swear I will. I'm not a marrying man; but you won't come to any harm through me. You do like me, don't you, little girl?

TOSSIE (*weakening*): Leave me go! You brute!

THONG: Tossie, I'm sorry I frightened you.

(*Releasing her, but warily watching her.*)

Let's be friends. Kiss and be friends.

TOSSIE: Oh, how dare you?

THONG: Kiss me.

TOSSIE: No! The girls were right about you. You're bad. I hate you.

THONG: Yes, I'm bad. I'm rotten. Because I want you.

(*She makes a movement to escape.*)

And you don't get away.

(*He attempts to kiss her. She escapes.*)

TOSSIE: You cad!

THONG: You're too delicious to let slip.

(*He attempts to seize her; she evades him, but he corners her.*)

TOSSIE: Listen, Mr. Thong. You've made a mistake about me. I'm not that sort of girl. I'm straight. If I wasn't—— You're not the first man who has tried it on.

THONG: No man's an angel when there are pretty women about.

TOSSIE: Oh, but you're not bad, not really bad. You're a good man—only women have given in so easily to you that you've never had a chance to respect us. But I know that, right down in your heart, you're good. I know you'll respect a girl who tries to go straight. You didn't know what you were doing just now. I know you're a gent, a real gent. I know you'll let me go.

THONG: Let you go! Not much! Why?

TOSSIE: Because I feel now that I can't go—not even if you stood over at that door. Because—oh, Mr. Thong!—I feel I don't *want* to go.

THONG: Don't want to go? Then it's all right.

TOSSIE: Mr. Thong, I'm good, I'm straight. And now—now I can't help myself. So you must help me. And I know you will—now that I am in your power, now that I almost love you. You wouldn't hurt a little bird that lay in your hand with a broken wing? You couldn't hurt me—and my wings are broken. So you'll be a man, and

let me go. You'll let me flutter away, won't you? Because I can't flutter far.

THONG: So you're straight, eh? Clean all through? I'm sorry. You've made me feel a fool. Will you forgive me, Tossie? Oh, no; I can't ask that.

TOSSIE: But I do forgive you.

THONG: It's nice of you to try and let me down easily, little bird; but I can't believe that.

TOSSIE: Women have to do a lot of forgiving, Mr. Thong. It's their business, you know. And I do forgive you, because—oh, I can't help it—because I do like you. Though I know it's wrong. But you let me go when both my wings were broken, and when I didn't even want to fly. And you knew it—and let me go. That's why I forgive you.

THONG: Tossie, you've beaten me. You've made me feel a blithering fool; and there's no worse hell for a man than that. I'm a bad egg. I'm sorry. I won't see you again. You're safe.

(*Turns to go.*)

TOSSIE: Good-bye. I don't hate you at all.

(*She extends her hand.*)

THONG: You'll shake hands?

TOSSIE: With a man I—respect.

THONG: Oh, come now, Tossie, you don't mean that?

TOSSIE: I do. But you must promise me one thing. Promise me you'll let women off—when they can't escape themselves. We're not much when we're up against temptation—at least the kind of women that you know; but there's very few of us, really, that want to go wrong. You've got all the odds on your side; but a real gent don't use them. And you're wrong when you think all women weak.

THONG: No; I've always know there was the other kind of woman. I have known one all my life. Known and loved her—and stood aside. And now I know two.

TOSSIE: Give them a chance, that's all.

THONG: I'll try, little bird—though I wouldn't put any money on the result. You see, I've got too many black marks against me, filed away up there.

TOSSIE: Listen! Can't you hear a sound up there, something like tearing up paper?

THONG: No.

TOSSIE: I can. It's that recording angel. He's ripping out page after page of your account.

THONG: Manipulating the books, is he? The old rascal! Wait till Judgment Day, and I'll bowl him out. Well?

(*He puts out his hand. She takes it.*)

Thanks. Now I'm going to get you some supper.

TOSSIE: I'm famished. Emotions do leave you empty, don't they?

(*They go out.*)

ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE and J. CHARTERIS MAGGS appear.

(*ELIZABETH comes in first, walking determinedly ahead of MAGGS.*)

ELIZA: Now! Say it here! The idea of proposing on the lawn in full sight of everybody, where there is no place to sit down!

(*She seats herself.*)

MAGGS (*stiffly, without enthusiasm*): Elizabeth, I love you.

ELIZA: Oh, is that all?

MAGGS: Yes—— Yes, I think that's all.

ELIZA: But it sounds so bare, Charteris. Can't you put some frillies round it?

MAGGS: I don't talk shop out of shop-hours. This is too important for frillies. I have loved you from the first.

ELIZA: But you never even spoke to me, till—till I was promoted to be Mr. Dangar's private secretary.

MAGGS: I worshipped at a distance, Elizabeth.

ELIZA: Tell me, Charteris, what do you love me for?

MAGGS: Your sal—— I really can't exactly tell. There's something about you—I think it is just you. But you're not answering me. Can you? Will you?

ELIZA: How on earth can I tell till you've kissed me?

MAGGS: Here?

ELIZA: No; on the customary place.

MAGGS (*seating himself beside her and perfunctorily kissing her*): Well?

ELIZA: I'm not quite sure. You might try again.

(*MAGGS does so.*)

Yes. It's quite astonishing how a kiss clears the head. No; you needn't stop.

(*He kisses her.*)

Yes, that settles it. I love you.

MAGGS: Darling! Then you'll marry me?

ELIZA: As quick as I can. I'm fair tired of the shop.

MAGGS (*taken aback, springing to his feet*): Tired of the shop? You're not thinking of giving up your job?

ELIZA: Oh, aren't I! There's not a girl in the shop that wouldn't chuck it to marry a Chinaman. Why, the only promotion we look to is a husband. Private secretary, when I can have a house of my own!

MAGGS: But, my darling, you know I haven't much of a screw.

ELIZA: One hundred and eighty. I looked it up long ago.

MAGGS: That isn't enough to set up housekeeping on, is it? I thought that with your screw added to mine we'd be able to have quite a swell little place.

ELIZA: Me go on typing other people's letters when I can have a house and a husband of my own!

MAGGS: No—— Of course—— But——

ELIZA: Me go on typing for old Dangar when I could be cooking for you!

MAGGS: But with your business prospects——?

ELIZA: I've got something better than business prospects.

(*She embraces him.*)

I've got you. And, bless your silly, sentimental heart, darling, I don't care how small your screw is as long as I've got you.

MAGGS: And you *have* got me.

(*She turns to go out.*)

This comes of marrying for money. And I might have had that bargain, Tossie!

(*They go out.*)

BABY DANGAR appears.

(*She meets LINDSAY THONG, entering from the garden.*)

BABY: Lindsay!

THONG: What's the trouble, Baby?

BABY: I must see Mr. Clibborn. You must find him and send him to me, here, at once.

THONG: Right. I saw him on the lawn just now.

BABY: And don't tell John. I must see Mr. Clibborn alone.

(*She throws her wrap on the seat.*)

THONG: Where's John, anyway?

BABY: I got rid of him by sending him down to the boat-house. Some of the girls want to go for a row in the moonlight.

THONG: What do you want to see Clibborn for? I saw John speaking to him half-an-hour ago.

BABY: That's why. That man won't give way. He means to ruin Guy and us.

THONG: Then why did he come here?

BABY: He came confident that John would accept his terms. He came here as a conqueror to accept our surrender.

THONG: Then nothing can be done.

BABY: You can't say till I—till I've appealed to him.

THONG: No chance.

BABY: Lindsay, don't you understand that I must save my boy—at whatever cost?

THONG: Baby, I don't like it. I'm afraid.

BABY: Of what?

THONG: Of the past.

BABY: Oh, that! That's dead.

THONG: Careful, Baby! No resurrections.

BABY: But for Guy!

THONG: Well, I'll send Clibborn. But, careful!

(*He goes off.*)

MAGGS and ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE enter with JOHN DANGAR.

(*At the sight of them BABY DANGAR retires quickly.*)

JOHN: But what is so important that it can't wait till to-morrow, Miss Hebblethwaite?

ELIZA: I want to resign, Mr. Dangar.

JOHN: Resign! Oh, I can't spare you. If it's a question of salary——

MAGGS: That's what I've been telling her, sir. I say she's chucking good money away.

ELIZA: But I'm going to be married, Mr. Dangar.

JOHN: Ah, that's a differnt matter. I see. Congratulations! I mustn't stand in your way, Miss Hebblethwaite, though it'll be hard to replace you. To you, Maggs?

MAGGS: She says so.

JOHN: I congratulate you, too, heartily. (*To ELIZABETH*) But what am I to do for another secretary so capable?

MAGGS: That's just what I've been telling her, sir. And if you were to raise her screw, she might—— (*To ELIZABETH*) We needn't be in too much of a hurry, darling.

ELIZA: Impossible. I must give my whole time now to my trousseau.

JOHN: Ah, well, we'll meet your wishes, Miss Hebblethwaite. Maggs, I congratulate you on getting an excellent business woman.

MAGGS: I know that, sir.

JOHN: But I'm keeping you from each other. You must have so much to say to each other, eh?

MAGGS: Oh, we've said it.

(*MAGGS and ELIZABETH HEBBLETHWAITE go out.*)

JOHN (*turning and for the first time noticing BABY*): Baby, what are you hiding here for?

BABY: Did you see about those girls and the boat?

JOHN: Oh, they're all right: got heaps of young men to look after them.

BABY: I've left my wrap somewhere. I can't go out without it. I left it on one of the seats on the lawn, near the terrace. Won't you please fetch it?

JOHN: But I saw it on you five minutes ago, dear.

BABY: I'm sure I left it on the lawn—the far end of the lawn.

JOHN: Why, here it is on the seat!

BABY: So it is! Curious, I was sure I had left it out there. Ah!

ANTHONY CLIBBORN enters.

CLIBBORN: You sent for me, Mrs. Dangar?

BABY: No.

CLIBBORN: Mr. Thong brought your message, your urgent message.

BABY: Some mistake. I'm sorry to have inconvenienced you, Mr. Clibborn.

CLIBBORN: But he insisted on my handing over my partner to him. He told me I should find you waiting here.

BABY: Oh, yes, I quite forgot. I did want to introduce you to a dear friend of mine, Mrs. Watson. I've been telling her about Mrs. Clibborn, and she's anxious to meet her.

CLIBBORN: Very kind of you, Mrs. Dangar. But where is she?

BABY: Why, she's not here. She must have slipped out. She was here a moment ago.

JOHN: But I've been here quite a time, and she wasn't here when I came. It's very curious.

(*With a keen look at BABY.*)

You wanted to see Clibborn. You sent for him. What for, Baby?

BABY: I did send for Mr. Clibborn. But now it doesn't matter.

JOHN: Because I'm here?

BABY: Yes.

JOHN: Ah! You tried to get me out of the way with that—that fiction—about your wrap. Yes, and that message you sent me to the boatshed. What have you to do with this man—in secret?

BABY: I just wanted a chat.

JOHN: Baby, you're not telling quite the truth.

BABY: You stupid old dear, flaring up in this absurd way! I did have something to tell Mr. Clibborn.

JOHN: Well, tell it.

BABY: I can't—while you're here.

JOHN: Now I'm here you must.

CLIBBORN: I assure you, Mr. Dangar, I have no idea of any communication Mrs. Dangar could have for me. Nor do I care to hear any. If you'll allow me, I'll go.

JOHN: No! Stay here. Baby, tell Mr. Clibborn what you sent for him for. I insist that you tell him now—in my presence.

BABY: John, I can't.

JOHN: Because I'm here.

BABY: Because you're here.

JOHN: There's something between you—some infernal secret that I've always suspected. By God, Baby, I'll find out. I've had enough of it. What is Clibborn to you, or you to him?

BABY: You must trust me—it is for Guy. I ask you to leave me and let me speak to Mr. Clibborn.

JOHN: If it's for Guy, I'm his father. I insist on being present.

BABY: I must speak, or Guy is ruined. And if you compel me to speak before you, you'll regret it all your life.

JOHN: Everything open and above board. No more women's tricks.

BABY: Then I'll speak. Mr. Clibborn, you are here to-night as our guest. I appeal to you to do your hostess a service. I am sure, now that you've seen how much it would mean to me—to us—for any scandal to touch Guy, that you will not insist. We've always been friends: we were friends even before I met my husband. Surely for the sake of that old friendship, you will relent? Surely, remembering those old days in Redfern, you came here to-night to say you will keep silent?

CLIBBORN: Mr. Guy has confessed his fault. I shall do my duty.

BABY: No. You are not unreasonable. You will give way—if we meet you fairly?

CLIBBORN: Mr. Dangar knows my terms.

BABY: Mr. Dangar will accept your terms.

JOHN: Never.

CLIBBORN: Then there is nothing more to be said.

BABY: Tony!

JOHN: "Tony!" Where did you learn to call this man Tony? What infernal secret is it between you? I will know.

LINDSAY THONG enters.

BABY: Lindsay! Take me into the garden! Take me away!

JOHN: No, Lindsay. This is my wife.

THONG: Oh, well.

(*Turns to go.*)

JOHN: No, stay. What my wife has to say to this man, you, our friend, must hear.

BABY: Yes, Lindsay, stay! I want you to stay. I shall need you—afterwards.

THONG: At your service, Baby.

JOHN: Now, speak.

BABY: You force me to speak before you. But Lindsay will understand. John, dear, I love you. Always remember that I love you. I have always loved you—except for two months' madness. Yes, John, I've been unfaithful to you. I've been weak and foolish and false—but that was all long, long ago, and I've repented through twenty years, twenty long years, every day and night of twenty thousand years. I've lived it down, and ever since I've loved you, only you.

JOHN: What, you——? You don't know what you're saying, Baby. You can't mean—oh, God! Quick, out with it!

BABY: I was unfaithful to you, John, twenty years ago.

JOHN: No, you can't mean—— You? My wife? Unfaithful? With whom? With whom?

BABY: With that man, Tony Clibborn.

CLIBBORN: No, no! She's mad, raving!

THONG: She's not responsible for what she's saying, John. Can't you see that she's so wrought up over Guy that she's hysterical. She'll say anything, anything to save him.

JOHN: Guy! Guy?

(*He clutches her and looks into her face.*)

BABY: You are not his father.

THONG: I was right, then.

JOHN: Not mine? Not my boy? But I've only your word—a woman's word.

BABY: Look at Guy. Look at his eyes.

JOHN (*clutching CLIBBORN by the shoulder, about to strike him*): You!

(*CLIBBORN looks him in the face.*)

His eyes! Guy's eyes!

(*He drops his hand and turns heavily away.*)

CLIBBORN: I swear I did not know. She lied to me.

JOHN: Lies, lies, always lies! All her life a lie! But you! (*Coming to CLIBBORN*) I can pay you out.

THONG: Steady, old man! That can't do any good.

JOHN: Nothing can do any good now.

(*He turns away.*)

CLIBBORN (*triumphant*): Guy, my son? My son!

BABY: John, that was all over twenty years ago. It was a year or so after our marriage, the time when I hardly ever saw you, when you were so wrapped up in your big ambitions—the ambitions I so wanted to share. And Tony had wanted me before you came into my life; and it was you who sent him back into my life. And I was young and silly, and persuaded myself that I was a neglected wife. And Tony was always there—in my house—taking your place, at your own wish. And so—so it happened. But I woke—when it was too late. I sent him out of my life—never to enter it again. He is nothing to me; he has been nothing to me all these years. And I kept my secret—even from him. I could not let my child go. Just as I could not let your love go. And ever since I have been paying for that short madness. John, I've paid and paid and paid, and now—why, I could almost laugh!—there is only this hour more to pay!

JOHN: Pah!

CLIBBORN: Guy! My boy!

BABY: John, I had to tell. I asked you to go away. You would not. And then—then there would have been no other chance, and Guy would have been ruined. I had to save him.

JOHN: To save your brat! To ruin him!

BABY: No, no. To save him. (*To CLIBBORN*) Tony, you cannot denounce Guy now—your son?

CLIBBORN: Mine? No, no. Everything is changed. I'll take him away—up country. He loves the country. A son! Guy! Guy Clibborn! Where is he?

THONG: I saw him just now in his room.

CLIBBORN: My child! I must see him. We'll go away—out of all this, into a new life.

BABY: You'll let me see him, sometimes?

CLIBBORN: Yes, yes.

BABY (*to THONG*): Guy! My baby! Guy!

(*CLIBBORN looks at the two backs turned to him and goes out.*)

THONG: You see, John, Baby was right. She has saved him.

JOHN: Lost him! Lost him for ever!

(*He turns on BABY.*)

Damn you and your lies!

BABY: No, the truth! At last the clean, straight truth!

JOHN: Your lies were kinder. What have I left now? Guy—and you—both dead.

THONG: No. That is done with. The hideous past is dead; but you've got the present, the future.

JOHN: Ashes—Dead Sea ashes!

BABY: I'll go, John. I had to speak. I'm glad, inexpressibly glad that I had the courage to speak. Good-bye.

(*Looks appealingly at him. He makes no move.*)

JOHN: Out of my life, you—you——!

(*BABY DANGAR goes slowly out, with a long look at him. The music of a waltz is heard again, all through the following scene, rising at the last to a triumphant climax.*)

THONG: Poor chap. It's a knock-out, I know. But you must listen

to me. All that happened years ago. All that has been lived down through twenty years of agony.

JOHN: How do I know? How do I know she's not lying yet, in love with him still? If she could live that lie to me for twenty years, why mayn't she be lying to me now? She has murdered something in me—my trust in her. I can never trust her again.

THONG: You talk like a melodrama. Life isn't a melodrama. She loves you. Ask yourself, man.

JOHN: All lies.

THONG: No. Why did she keep silence so long? To retain your love.

JOHN: How do I know. Everything is gone.

(*With a sudden hope.*)

Lindsay, after all, her confession was only another lie—a desperate lie to save our—to save the boy.

THONG: It was the truth.

JOHN: But we've only got her word to go on.

THONG: John, old chap, I know.

JOHN: You knew?

THONG: From the first. She told me.

JOHN: You knew all along that Guy——?

THONG: No. She never told me that. But I suspected.

JOHN: But you knew about her and that man?

THONG: Yes.

JOHN: I see now that I must have suspected all along. But the thing was inconceivable. Yet Guy was so different to me—so unbusiness-like. And his eyes!

THONG: Baby told me—with tears and abasement—after she had sent Clibborn away—for ever. That brief madness—for which you were to blame—had burnt itself out. And she meant to confess it all to you.

JOHN: Ha!

THONG: I wouldn't let her. I persuaded her out of it. And I acted rightly. There isn't one of us, man or woman, who hasn't some ugly little incident that is happily buried, and won't bear exhuming. If she kept silence she was safe—she could retain your love, the only thing she cared for then. But could she have kept silence when she saw her boy being ruined before her eyes? Baby isn't that sort, thank God! Think! When you shrank from a trivial business sacrifice to save Guy, she risked all her happiness. I believe every mother in the world would have done the same. John, old chap, can't you see the greatness of her sacrifice?

JOHN: Impulse, a mere unreasonable impulse.

THONG: What would you give to be capable of such an impulse? These women, we laugh at them, we pet them, we play with them, we carefully, or contemptuously, screen them from all the big things of life, and yet——! They're bigger than us, they're greater than us.

JOHN: What's the good of talk. The thing's done.

THONG: The error is done, finished with, buried. But there is the future.

JOHN: Well? I've just got to go through with it.

THONG: John!

JOHN: What can you expect me to do?

THONG: Forgive her. Take her back.

JOHN: Forgive her—that?

THONG: No. Go down on your knees and thank her.

JOHN: For what?

THONG: For her sacrifice.

JOHN: Pah! A mere animal instinct for her cub.

THONG: It seems to me that there isn't anything higher in the world than that. Without that instinct, where would this old rotter of a world have been by now? Why, a mother started sacrificing herself for you as soon as you were born. If she had left you to yourself, if she hadn't had that mere animal instinct for her cub! Merely being born of a woman isn't the great thing: it's her long sacrifice for us that makes our debt so huge. Why, if the bringing up of children had been left to men, we'd drown 'em as a nuisance. But a mother, even after she's had a dozen of 'em, does she ever think of drowning the thirteenth? No; they can't help it. They've got the itch to sacrifice. That's what they came into this world for.

JOHN: But to ruin my life?

THONG: No, to make your life. You've been so wrapped up in your business that you've never lived. You looked on your wife as a pleasant slave provided by providence to look after your home and put in your shirt-studs. And all the while she had her own life to live—and you stayed outside, and slammed the door. Can you blame her—young, inexperienced, weak—if when she found that one door locked against her, she tried the latch of another?

JOHN: What is before us both now, but hate and loneliness?

THONG: The future is before you, the new life, the true comradeship. You've never understood each other, never made allowances for each other. You must forgive her—for she has loved much. You must go humbly to her, and, seeing her weakness, be grateful for a strength in her that is greater than yours. You must make the best of her—and the best of a woman is finer than the best of a man.

JOHN: Talk! Talk! If I could forgive her, how could I forget the past.

THONG: Dead! Twenty years dead.

JOHN: No; this is its resurrection.

THONG: Yes, a resurrection. That dead fault, that dead secret, lying all these years in its grave, pressed down with terrified hands—that dead thing has come to life, gloriously raised by a supreme sacrifice. Think of the sheer bravery of that moment, you brave man! Without that dead sin you would never have known the fine fibre of Baby's soul. And this is the woman you could let slip from your life! This is the woman you think you can let go. Can you, dare you, John Dangar, business man?

JOHN: Wait, wait. Everything's gone. Love, wife, child.

THONG: Your boy's gone—he was never yours. You never liked him. You never were friends. Well, he's gone out of the life he was never in. But your wife? She's still within your reach—and you want to send her for ever beyond your reach. Lonely, old boy? You'll be lonely. You won't like it; you can't stand it. Business won't make up for that loss. Suppose she has deceived you. Are there any men whom women haven't deceived? I've had my share of their tricks. Bless 'em, it's their game. They're brought up on it; we expect it of 'em. We wouldn't like if, by some miracle, a woman did tell us the truth about ourselves. I heard it once, and it wasn't nice. I heard it only to-night. And, after all, what do women's lies matter? We allow for them. It's only a game of theirs: they play it as a game. You know it takes a man to be a real professional liar—and even a real liar has to pass all sorts of difficult examinations before he's allowed to practice. Why, women's deceit is half their charm—for us. They keep us delightfully guessing. And once we've guessed that big conundrum, Woman, life holds nothing more for us but a good dinner. Granted, John, that this deceit was a big one—the biggest card a woman can play. Granted that she's betrayed you, broken you. Well, cut that out. Aren't there enough

of her good qualities left to enable you to carry on? She's not an angel. She's better: she's a woman. And you're not exactly an angel yourself. Suppose she's not your ideal now. Suppose she's only the second best. You thought you had got the best. Not all of us deserve the best. But we men get a damn sight more than we do deserve when we get a good woman like Baby. And isn't the second best better than none at all? She's your wife; she loves you: she proved that just now. You love her—oh, yes, you do—or you would have forgiven her half-an-hour ago. You've grown accustomed to her. You'll miss her. Oh, lord, how you'll miss her! You'll miss her about the house; you'll have to engage a housekeeper. You know you can't manage servants. All you can manage is a shop. Well, she's your housekeeper; she knows your ways, she makes things run easily for you. I know what it takes to run a house smoothly: I'm a bachelor. John, I'm simply appealing to your business interests. Stick to your housekeeper. Changes are bad for business.

JOHN: Wait, wait! It's too soon. Wait!

THONG: Wait? Isn't she waiting? Out there somewhere, isn't every minute now to her an eternity? You simply can't afford to wait. If you wait an hour you'll have to wait a lifetime. You're not a young man; you haven't a long time to make it up in. Begin now. This isn't a lovers' quarrel. You've grown into a friendship more compact than love. Well, you'll send her away. And for the rest of your lives you two, who need each other now that you've only got each other, will be dead to each other, dead in the same small world. You won't like it. You can't even button a stud without her fingers. But you'll be too proud, and you'll go on breaking your finger-nails over your studs and wasting time and bad language. You will make the experiment of living without women—an experiment that has, so far, never succeeded. Look at me! Women may be weaklings and wasters, but we can't do without at least one of 'em.

JOHN: It's no use, Lindsay. I can't think yet. Wait.

THONG: And she! Man, do you think she would come back to you if you waited half-an-hour more? She's growing away from you every moment you waste listening to me.

JOHN: It's easy enough for you to talk. I'm on the rack, and you expect me to behave like a reasonable man. Oh, you can talk; and what you say is right; but you're outside of it all. It doesn't hurt you. It's easy for you.

THONG: Easy? Good God, John, can't you guess how hard it is for me. Haven't you ever guessed?

JOHN: You? You've—loved her?

THONG: Loved her? Man, I love her. I've loved her ever since I saw her at your wedding. I love her better than you ever did.

JOHN: You told her?

THONG: Told her? No, you thundering fool! Didn't I say I love her?

JOHN: She doesn't know?

THONG: Thank all the gods, she doesn't know. I've been happy enough. It's something worth while just to love a woman like that. I'm not much. That old clerk of a recording angel works overtime solely on my account; but all the good there is in me is due to Baby. And do you think I don't see her faults? And do her faults make any difference? And, John, if you send her out of your life, I—— No; I don't think I could tell her, even then.

JOHN: Lindsay, I love her. Can't you see that it is because I love her that I can't forgive her.

THONG: Is it because you love her that you stand here listening to a wind-bag and letting her cry her dear eyes out? She has sacrificed all. Can't you sacrifice that trivial thing, your pride? Haven't I sacrificed—for twenty years?

JOHN: Lindsay, you're right. You've taught me. I did not know that love could be like that.

THONG: John! Go to her. Say nothing. Hold out your arms.

JOHN: You think there's yet time to get her back?

THONG: I know her better than you. There's time.

JOHN: In the garden——?

THONG: Yes. Don't speak. Take her in your arms and let her have a good, comfortable cry.

JOHN: If only I'm in time——!

JOHN DANGAR goes out quickly.

(*The music of the waltz swells triumphantly.*)

THONG (*watching him off, then turning, with a gesture of renunciation, and looking up and raising his arm triumphantly*): Wake up, you old rotter of a recording angel up there! Wake up! And put down one little white mark on those big blank pages devoted to the credit-balance of Lindsay Thong, bad egg!

(*CURTAIN.*)

GALAHAD JONES.

GALAHAD JONES

A Comedy with a Tragic Tang.

Dramatised from "GALAHAD JONES," a novel by Arthur H. Adams.

PERSONS IN THE COMEDY.

GALAHAD JONES
SIBYL BEACH
PEARL
THE BUTCHER
EDWARD BEACH
THE DOCTOR
KATHIE JONES
HORACE LOTHIAN
A YOUNG MAN
AN OLD GENTLEMAN
EM. JONES

ACT 1.—Sibyl's garden and, over the wall, the street. Saturday afternoon.

ACT 2.—The same. The evening after.

ACT 3.—Interior of Galahad's dining-room. Sunday afternoon, three weeks later.

ACT 4.—Sibyl's garden and the street. The same evening.

The action takes place at Sydney, Australia.

ACT ONE.

SCENE: *Looking from Sydney Harbour at the waterfront of a residence at Elizabeth Bay, your view takes in, in addition to the garden that slopes down to the water's edge, a portion of a curving narrow street that leads to the water. You do not see the water, which would be where the footlights are; but you note the stone coping a few inches high, which runs right across the stage a few feet behind the footlights, representing the top of the stone wall that marks the harbour edge.*

Between the garden and the street runs a high stone wall, the end of which, protected by an ironwork affair of spikes, fronts you. The effect is that you can see both what is happening in the garden and what occurs in the street.

The stone wall runs diagonally from your right to near the centre of the scene. A garden gate breaks it about half-way up. Portion of another stone wall, right on the waterfront, is seen jutting out on your right. A narrow footpath runs along the garden wall, and at the corner there is a lamp-post.

A couple of piles—the tops only being seen, rise a couple of feet above the stone coping of the waterfront at the near end of the street. The top of these piles would make a comfortable seat for a man fishing. The other end of the street is hidden by the curve of the wall. And over this wall are seen the tops of trees, and further off, the roofs of buildings.

The garden, occupying most of the scene, is terraced. From the waterfront it runs back level for a few yards, then rises in a turf bank, capped by a low stone balustrade. Behind this a summer-house stands, covered with the purple of wistaria in blossom—a rustic-looking structure of untrimmed beams. A rough, rustic wooden seat is at the door.

A curving path runs down to the waterfront. It breaks the terrace by a few stone steps. Three garden seats are placed in the garden, one of them being set against the garden wall.

Trees, shrubs and flowers fill the garden as it runs back to the big house, seen behind the foliage. On your left is a jacaranda tree in flower. A blue sky hangs over all.

It is late afternoon.

Galahad Jones, a plump, undistinguished, genial, middle-aged little man, with a pudgy moustache, dressed in the well-worn, respectable clothes of a bank clerk past his illusions, is seen sitting on one of the piles at the waterfront of the street. He has a small sprig of boronia in his buttonhole. He is occupied in baiting a fishing-line, which is attached to a slim fishing-rod. He gets the parcel of bait from a squat little black business-man's bag at his side, baits the hook, and lifting the rod, extends it over the water. (In reality, he is fishing into the orchestra.) He waits patiently for a bite.

All through the following scene he remains, completely absorbed in his fishing, oblivious to any happenings over the wall or even behind his back. He lights his pipe, thinks he has a fish, pulls in his line, to find that he has not caught anything, baits it again and tries his luck once more with stolid patience.

SIBYL BEACH and PEARL, the housemaid, come down the path into the garden. SIBYL, a slight, beautiful, pallid, dark girl of seventeen, looking very frail in her dainty summer dress, walks with languid steps, leaning on the arm of the buxom PEARL.

SIBYL (*pausing at the top of the steps, and looking straight out*): Oh, the beautiful, beautiful Harbour!

(*She draws a deep breath of delight, then turns to PEARL.*) But are you sure?

PEARL: Yes, Miss Sibyl. No letters have come for you.

SIBYL: You mean that you've had instructions from father to hand my letters over to him—like the other servants?

PEARL: No, Miss Sibyl. They simply 'asn't come. I don't think the postman's bin yet.

SIBYL: But he *must* have written. Father won't let me hear from him. He says he can't understand me being in love. As if any girl could help being in love with Horace!

PEARL: 'Is name is 'Orace, Miss?

(*She helps SIBYL down the steps.*)

SIBYL: Yes. (*With a look at PEARL*) You must help me, Pearl. You're the only one in all the house that can help me. I suppose, when you came two days ago, you thought you were just coming to an ordinary house?

PEARL: And ain't it, Miss?

SIBYL: No. It's a prison.

PEARL: A prison, Miss? Lor'!

SIBYL: Yes, that big wall is the wall of a prison.

(*Sitting languidly on the garden-seat.*)

And I'm the prisoner, and father is the jailor. I'm kept here because the doctor thinks I'm ill. *You* don't think I'm ill, do you?

PEARL: A little tired-looking, Miss Sibyl. That's all.

SIBYL: Yes, I'm always tired. I seem to get more tired every day; but not ill! I haven't got a single symptom. And so I'm in prison; and over that big wall Horace is dying to come to me.

PEARL: Well, Miss, why don't 'e come?

SIBYL: Because he doesn't know where I am. We only moved here a fortnight ago. Our other house was on the tram-line; and the doctor told father that I had to have perfect quiet.

PEARL: And didn't you write and tell this 'ere 'Orace?

SIBYL: Father made me promise not to write to him; and I suppose he's been writing and writing to our old house—and it's shut up.

PEARL: But, Miss, the letters would be sent on 'ere.

SIBYL: So they are; but father takes them.

PEARL: But, Miss, are you sure?

SIBYL: Father says no letters have come; but I know Horace—so father must have taken them.

PEARL: I tell you what, Miss Sibyl. I'll look out for the postman myself to-day.

SIBYL: Pearl, you're not in the conspiracy with the rest of them to keep me away from Horace?

PEARL: Mr. Beach told me to look after you, Miss, and see that you didn't tire yourself or get excited-like; but 'e never said a word about keepin' letters from you. The idear! Perhaps, Miss, this Mr. 'Orace 'as forgot to write.

SIBYL: Horace forget? Why, he loves me!

PEARL: I've 'ad boys who swore they loved me, too. Why, there was such a nice gent, a butcher 'e was, that made vi'lent love to me in the back porch every day in my last place; and, would you believe it, Miss, I found out that 'e was doin' the same to every girl 'e delivered the meat to down the street! Forget? Why 'e just wiped off the kiss I gave him, and got ready for the next. Greasy kisses they was, too.

SIBYL: Horace forget? And yet—what if he hasn't written? Oh, he might be ill—or dead! And I don't know. Father keeps me in—like a naughty school-girl. And I'm seventeen! Pearl, you must help me!

PEARL: That I'll do, Miss Sibyl. You'd do the same for me if ever I wanted to see my butcher again—which I don't, except to slap 'is

'andsome face! Why don't you write to 'im, Miss? I'll post your letter.

SIBYL: I promised father, but—— Pearl, do look over the wall and see if—if the postman is coming.

PEARL (*goes to the seat against the wall, and standing on one of its broad arms, looks over the wall, concealing her head behind the foliage of a tree, which at this point tops the wall*): There's nobody 'ere, except an old chap fishin'.

SIBYL (*immediately PEARL has gone, takes up a novel she was carrying, and in opening it three envelopes drop out. She hastily picks them up, and, with a scared look at PEARL, whose back is turned, conceals them in her book, and pretends to read*).

PEARL (*who is still gazing over the wall, surprised*): Oh!

THE BUTCHER appears in the street.

(*He is dressed in spotless white duck, with a striped butcher's apron, and carries, jauntily, a basket of meat. He is young, immaculately neat, and brilliantly handsome in a full-blooded, slightly coarse way. He is passing round the corner to go up the street when he notices GALAHAD fishing. At this moment GALAHAD has got his first bite. He excitedly pulls in his line; and THE BUTCHER, excited, too, waits behind him to watch. There is no fish, however, and both are disappointed.*)

BUTCHER: No luck, Mister?

GALAHAD: I had a bite. I distinctly had a bite! A big 'un, too!

BUTCHER: They're always woppers—the ones you don't catch. Hullo! Wot's that smell? Oh, that bit of boronia. Lovely, ain't it? Reminds me of pork cracklin'.

GALAHAD: Yes, I bought it in the street—dunno what for. Cost me threepence, too. Seems a sort of memory in its perfume—takes me back—reminds me of my wife.

BUTCHER: I shouldn't think that sorter memory was very excitin', boss.

GALAHAD: Oh, not my wife as she is; but when she was a girl, when I first knew her, when I was in love with her.

BUTCHER: Well, the smell of boronia always makes me think of pork cracklin'.

GALAHAD (*sneezing*): Aow! I've got a bit of a cold, and I believe the scent of this boronia makes me sneeze. I'll take it home to little Gracie. Do you know that child simply dotes on flowers.

BUTCHER: Well, this won't pay me rent. So long.

GALAHAD: I'll have that big 'un yet.

(*He begins to bait his line.*)

BUTCHER: Yes. I *don't* think.

(*The BUTCHER goes jauntily up the street.*)

(*GALAHAD goes back to his fishing.*)

PEARL (*who has been excitedly watching*): Oh!

SIBYL: Is it the postman?

PEARL: No.

(*She jumps down.*)

But, Miss, 'oo do you think I seen?

SIBYL: Horace?

PEARL: No; I don't know 'im, Miss. It was the butcher—*my* butcher! And I haven't set eyes on him for three munce!

SIBYL: Perhaps he's *our* butcher, Pearl. Run away and take in the meat.

PEARL: Oh, Miss, I'd like to—just to snub 'im. But the master told me never to leave you alone out 'ere. You might faint, 'e ses.

SIBYL: There you go, like the rest of them, making out I'm ill.

I'll be all right sitting here and looking out over the water. It's beautiful as the evening comes on and the warships and the ferry-boats light up.

PEARL: Very well, Miss. Thank you! Oh, just won't I nark 'im, the brute!

(*She goes up the steps and into the house at the back.*)

SIBYL (*as soon as PEARL is out of sight, looks cautiously round, gets up, looks round at the summer-house, and extracts the three envelopes from the book*) I don't trust Pearl, either. They're all against me.

(*Opening an envelope and taking out the enclosure.*)

Father has forbidden me to write to Horace; but I'm sure he's keeping Horace's letters. That's not fair. Besides, he didn't say anything about not writing to anybody else.

(*She reads the letter.*)

"A woman, in sore need, confidently asks your aid. For only you can help me. I am among enemies, watched and powerless. This afternoon at half-past five you must meet me in the garden. Come in by the gate in the wall. See that no one notices you entering, for secrecy is essential. Come to the summer-house. I shall be waiting there, praying that my knight will come. If you are not afraid to assist me—in how desperate a case I am you may judge by this appeal to a stranger—make some inconspicuous gesture beneath the wall. I shall be watching you through the trees at the top of the wall. But do not wave or take the slightest notice of me. I may be watched. Just pretend to sneeze. I shall understand.

"A WOMAN."

There! That ought to bring him. But I haven't addressed it. Let me see. Mister—— But I don't know who will pick it up. And it must be addressed. Ah, yes.

(*She prints in pencil on the envelope.*)

"To You."

(*Taking the other envelopes she does the same.*)

In case the first misses fire.

(*Then with another look round, she goes to the seat under the wall, climbs up on it, and looks over the wall through the foliage.*)

Nobody in sight. Nobody ever does come down this lane—except butchers.

(*She notices GALAHAD fishing.*)

That man fishing. I wonder——? No; he's altogether too commonplace to be my knight. I'll just drop one quietly here, and some one——

(*She is about to drop the letter, when she hears a sound behind her, slips down and looks up the garden path from the shelter of the summer-house.*)

Father! And the doctor! Oh, they mustn't see me here. They'd send me in—to bed!

(*She hides in the summer-house. Through the lattice-work you can see her white form on a seat.*)

MR. BEACH and THE DOCTOR come down the path.

(*MR. BEACH is an elderly man, well dressed, capable, the typical successful bank-manager. THE DOCTOR is youthful, precise, clever-looking.*)

BEACH: You can tell me here. It's cooler.

(*They come down the steps and sit on the seat. THE DOCTOR remains silent.*)

Well, Doctor? What do your colleagues think of Sibyl? She's getting better, isn't she?

DOCTOR: I'm sorry, Mr. Beach, I can't promise that, at present.

BEACH: Not better? Surely?

DOCTOR: Of course, we can never be quite sure. Nature has

her own miracles. But, Mr. Beach, I say seriously it will need a miracle.

BEACH: You can't mean, Doctor? No. She's all I have.

DOCTOR: I had a consultation this afternoon with the two specialists—the best specialists in Sydney—and they agree with me. I'm sorry to say that your daughter cannot live more than three weeks.

(A slight, stifled cry is heard in the summer-house, and SIBYL is seen to rise, and, horror-stricken, lean against the door, listening.)

BEACH: Three weeks? To die? Doctor, oh no! She's so young—so full of life!

DOCTOR: It's a case of progressive anaemia. A rare disease. In fact, we know very little about it. And we can do less. Some change in the white corpuscles of the blood—a progressive change. The patient simply wastes away. We can only prescribe rest and quiet—to make her last days as happy as possible.

BEACH: Her last days!

DOCTOR: Still, some cases—some of the worst—have unaccountably recovered.

BEACH: There's hope, then?

DOCTOR: A shred of hope. But it is my duty to warn you not to build too much on that hope.

BEACH: Then? Then—my Sibyl—to die?

DOCTOR: She may have three weeks—at the utmost.

BEACH: Three weeks—of life; and she is only seventeen!

DOCTOR: It may be less. Any excitement would be fatal.

BEACH: Then I shall be quite alone. But she has no symptoms—she's only tired and run down.

DOCTOR: There's one certain test—I'll make it to-morrow. I didn't do it to-day. I don't want to frighten her—to make her think she's so ill. If I prick her finger, she has so little blood in her that it won't bleed.

BEACH: Not bleed?

DOCTOR: I'll see to-morrow. But I'm sure, and my colleagues agree with me. Keep her as much in the open air as possible—this garden.

BEACH (*rising and moving blindly across to the other seat*): This garden—without Sibyl!

(*THE DOCTOR follows him.*)

So full of life—why, the poor child is actually in love!

(*SIBYL, as she sees them moving away from her, makes a despairing, tragic gesture, and faints, falling inside the summer-house.*)

DOCTOR: In love?

BEACH: Oh, some trifling affair—with a youth I've not even seen. Met him outside somewhere—in a tram. I found out and stopped it.

DOCTOR: Quite right. Any emotional excitement would be immediately fatal.

BEACH: A boy and girl affair; but she takes it as a matter of life and death. Life—and death! I've forbidden her to write to him.

DOCTOR: But she gets *his* letters? That's dangerous.

BEACH: No; he hasn't written for a month or more. He's forgotten her. But Sibyl believes in him—thinks he writes, poor child! and that I confiscate his letters. Could I tell her he's forgotten her?

DOCTOR: No. It would only excite her. Come, Mr. Beach. You'll have all the medical skill available. Nothing is absolutely sure in life—not even death. We must hope for the miracle.

BEACH: The miracle! I shall pray for the miracle!

(*He goes up the steps.*)

My Sibyl! I shall have her for three weeks. And then——

(*He breaks down.*)

Oh, the pretty baby she was in her little cot!

DOCTOR: Come, come, Mr. Beach. You must pray for the miracle!

(*They go up the path, THE DOCTOR comforting the broken man.*)

(*No sound or movement comes from the summer-house.*)

KATHIE JONES and HORACE appear in the street.

KATHIE is a pretty girl of seventeen, without any individuality, cheaply dressed, yet with the effect of smartness that comes from her employment in a millinery shop. HORACE is just the superbly dressed, self-satisfied youthful clerk in a city office, his ideas at present being bounded by a possible rise in his "screw" and the varied charm of girls. At present he is completely absorbed in KATHIE, and she in him. So it is that, with the lovers' supreme disdain of the rest of the world, they do not notice the inconspicuous figure of GALAHAD, intent on his line, his back to them.)

HORACE (*as they come slowly down, his arm round her, and halt near the lamp-post at the corner*): What a rippin' street this is, Kathie!

KATHIE: Go on, now, Horace. What's there ripping about it?

HORACE: It's so quiet.

(*He stands with his back to GALAHAD.*)

Why anything could happen here.

KATHIE: It's too near home, for my taste. Mother might spot us.

HORACE: Why, do you live about here?

KATHIE: Just round the corner, and down the next street. There, I shouldn't have told you that.

HORACE: Why not, Kathie?

KATHIE: I don't really know you, do I?

HORACE: I think we know each other very well—well enough to——

(*He attempts to kiss her.*)

KATHIE: No, you don't! I'm not going to let you till I know you haven't got another girl.

HORACE: But I haven't, really.

KATHIE: Who's that girl, a pale thin thing, I've seen you with?

HORACE: You've never seen me with any other girl since I've known you, Kathie.

KATHIE: No; but this was before you met me.

HORACE: Oh, her! I *was* a bit struck on her then. Her name's Sibyl—but that's all off. I haven't seen her for a month. It was too risky. Her father made her promise not to see me again. Besides, it wasn't serious—just flirting.

KATHIE: And how do I know you're not just flirting with me?

HORACE: Kathie, this is different. I—I've never liked a girl so much as you before.

KATHIE: Straight, Horace? And that other girl—Sibyl?

HORACE: I tell you I've done with her. A fellow makes mistakes, you know. I soon saw she wasn't my type. I don't even know where she lives now.

KATHIE: She looked very pretty, Horace.

HORACE: Nothing like as pretty as you, Kathie.

KATHIE: I suppose I must believe you.

HORACE: Then that's all right.

(*He attempts warily to kiss her again.*)

KATHIE: It's wrong, meeting you like this.

HORACE: It's very nice.

KATHIE: It *is* nice—that's what makes it wrong. But if father knew——

HORACE: What's your father?

KATHIE: He's in a bank.

HORACE: Well, let's hope he's in his bank now.

KATHIE: No; he's always pottering about. He goes fishing.

(*Suddenly noticing GALAHAD'S back.*)

Why, there's a man fishing there!

HORACE (*noticing GALAHAD, who is wildly intent on his line.*) Oh, he doesn't matter.

KATHIE: Oo, I do believe it's father!

HORACE: Oo!

(*They tip-toe up the street.*)

(*GALAHAD, not observving them, goes on fishing.*)

(*In the summer-house in the garden, SIBYL, coming from her faint, slowly sits up, and makes her way to the rustic seat. The realisation of her fate slowly comes to her face.*)

SIBYL: To die! Only three little weeks! No! I'll not give in. I'll live. Why, I've got everything to live for. If Horace didn't love me I wouldn't care. But he does! So there's nothing the matter with me. That doctor is just scaring father. And yet he said something about a test. If he pricked my finger it wouldn't bleed. That's nonsense.

(*She takes a pin out of her dress and deliberately drives it into her finger, wincing. She watches it carefully, and then holds the finger up. There is no blood on it.*)

It doesn't bleed! Then—then—— I must die! (*Bravely*) But if I have to die I'll not die like this—in prison. Excitement would be fatal? Well, let it! I've got three long weeks; and I'll live every second of them. I'll make them thirty years. Why, Horace and I have a whole life-time before us. Oh, now, I can't waste a moment.

(*She picks up her book from the door of the summer-house, and takes the three envelopes from it.*)

I was only half in earnest before. I did it for fun. But now——

(*She goes to the seat under the wall, mounts, it and looks over into the street. The only person in sight is GALAHAD. Vexed.*)

Only that silly man fishing!

A YOUNG MAN appears, well dressed, the figure of the knight she is craving for.

(*SIBYL throws the first letter at his feet. He picks it up, after a look round, reads the address, chuckles, and reads it through.*)

THE YOUNG MAN: They don't have *me!* I've been played that trick before.

(*He tears the letter into pieces, and goes out.*)

SIBYL: Beast!

AN OLD GENTLEMAN appears.

SIBYL: He doesn't look like a knight; but I'm desperate.

(*She throws a letter at his feet.*)

(*THE OLD GENTLEMAN peers round, pokes at it with his umbrella, clucks with his tongue, and passes out, shaking a knowing old head.*)

SIBYL: Brute! Never even read it. And oh, how lonely it looks lying there! Oh, if only my knight would come along and pick it up!

THE BUTCHER re-appears.

(*He is stepping jauntily along when he sees the letter. He picks it up and looks at it.*)

SIBYL: A butcher. Pearl's butcher. Oh, his greasy fingers! (*To herself*) Please give it back.

BUTCHER: "To you!"

(*He looks at the wall. SIBYL ducks. He opens it and reads it.*)

Another of 'em! They simply can't leave me alone.

(*Catching sight of SIBYL'S incautious head, kisses the letter and waves it.*)

Wot oh!

(*SIBYL ducks.*)

She's a bit of orl right.

(*He comes to the end of the wall and tries to peer in.*)

Didn't recognise 'er, though. Must be a new 'un. Love at first sight. But I can't waste time on every bit of skirt that falls in love with me. But I'd like to see 'oo she is. And that's the only 'ouse in the street that I don't serve. My luck's out.

(*He reads the letter again.*)

I mustn't attract anybody's attention. She's watched.

(*Noticing GALAHAD.*)

That bloke's a detective. Meet 'er at half-past five—why it's that now, and I've got ter deliver to a dozen 'ouses yet.

(*Louder, to her.*)

Can't do it ter day, my dear. But I'll be along ter-morrow night at eight o'clock. You be there, and when it's your night out I'll be waiting at the back gate. Wot oh!

(*He carefully folds up the letter, puts it in his basket, under the meat, and disappears.*)

SIBYL: My letter among his greasy meat! Oh, and I prayed for a knight!

(*GALAHAD has, by this time, had enough of his fishing, and has fixed up his rod and line. He looks at his watch.*)

GALAHAD: Half-past five! Must be toddling home to tea.

(*He picks up his rod in one hand and his black bag in the other.*)

Mustn't keep Em waiting.

(*He blows his nose.*)

Dash this cold! I'll be sneezing again.

(*Looking at the boronia.*)

It's that boronia. I've a good mind to chuck it away. No; Gracie would like it.

(*He moves up the street.*)

(*SIBYL in desperation throws the third letter at his feet. He peers round, and picks up the letter.*)

GALAHAD: To me? Some mistake.

(*He looks up at the wall. SIBYL waves her hand encouragingly.*)

A woman's hand!

(*The hand withdraws.*)

It must be for me.

(*He places the rod against the wall, and reads the letter.*)

"A woman . . . asks your aid . . . among enemies . . . secrecy is essential . . . I shall be waiting . . . Do not wave . . . Be careful . . . Just pretend to sneeze. . . " No; it's a trap. Some adventuress wants to lead me astray. I've seen 'em on the stage. Me? Galahad Jones, with a wife and a family! Meet her at half-past five. Why it's that now. A woman I've never seen—except her hand. A beautiful hand—like Em's when I first knew her. But what would they think of me at the Bank? And what would the wife think? It's too risky. And yet—that slim, white hand. No; it's time to go home to tea. I'll go straight home. Mustn't keep Em waiting.

(*He picks up the rod, turns and goes determinedly up the street, but stops.*)

Oh, I'm going to sneeze! I can't help it!

(*He drops the rod and sneezes.*)

(*He looks up, and to his consternation sees SIBYL'S hand waving once more to him. He comes back.*)

Oh, well, I'm in for it now—and tea can wait.

(*He goes up to the gate, but finds it locked.*)

Locked!

(*He climbs laboriously over, still with his black bag in his hand.*)

(*SIBYL runs to the summer-house and hides inside. GALAHAD comes down the path and goes doubtfully to the summer-house.*)

SIBYL: So, you've come! Oh, that's good of you.

(*She gives him her hand. Clumsily he takes it.*)

You can't know how I depended on you. You are the only person in the world who can help me. You'll help me, won't you?

GALAHAD: Yes, yes, anything I can do, of course—as long as it's not illegal.

SIBYL: Oh!

GALAHAD: But what must I do?

SIBYL: I'll tell you. I'm shut up here. Not imprisoned really; but my father thinks me ill, and won't let me go out or get letters. So I had to make use of you. You don't know how relieved I was when you sneezed. You did it so naturally, too. I'm sure if anybody was listening they couldn't have told it from a really-truly sneeze—the sort of sneeze you simply *have* to! A man who could sneeze like that is the very sort of conspirator I want.

GALAHAD: Oh, that's nothing—for a lady in distress. But why did you select *me?*

SIBYL: You were my last resort.

GALAHAD: Oh!

SIBYL: I tried two others first.

GALAHAD: You didn't pick me out?

SIBYL: Oh, no. You were the third. The other letters were wasted. I've been throwing over letters all the afternoon. I was desperate; but you looked kind, and I chanced it. And I'm so glad.

GALAHAD: So am I. But I don't even know your name.

SIBYL: Oh, you can call me Sibyl.

GALAHAD: Miss Sibyl. I'll do anything for you—in reason.

SIBYL: First, you must swear a dreadful oath——

GALAHAD: The only time I swear is when I'm annoyed, and I'm not at all annoyed now.

SIBYL: I mean you must swear secrecy. You mustn't even let my father know, or anybody.

GALAHAD: It doesn't sound quite respectable. You're sure you're not a secret society?

SIBYL: No. You must swear that you will not betray me.

GALAHAD: Oh, I'll swear that all right. I'll never betray you.

SIBYL: That's all right. I love someone very dearly. I love him as much as I love life—no, more than I love life.

GALAHAD: But—but you've never even seen me before.

SIBYL: You? You dear old thing, you don't imagine I'm in love with *you!* No; you're joking.

GALAHAD: Yes, I was joking. But who?

SIBYL: Horace Lothian.

GALAHAD: I don't know him.

SIBYL: Of course you don't.

GALAHAD: And is he in love with you?

SIBYL: Yes, yes. He *must* love me, because there are only three weeks—— You must bring him here to-morrow night.

GALAHAD: But why doesn't he come himself?

SIBYL: Because he doesn't know where I am. We've only just moved here, and father won't let me write to him. So you'll bring him?

GALAHAD: I would have helped you to elope, or kill a constable with a bomb—and all you want is a messenger boy! But I'll do it. Where is he?

SIBYL: He's in Blough's—a clerk.

GALAHAD: I'll fetch him. And now I must be off. This is trespassing. And I'll be late for tea, and, you know, the wife——

SIBYL: Your wife! You're married?

GALAHAD: Oh, yes, I'm married right enough.

SIBYL: What's her name?

GALAHAD: Em.

SIBYL: Em.

GALAHAD: We've got five children.

SIBYL: Five!

GALAHAD: The eldest girl, Kathie, is just about your age. So you can see it wouldn't do to be caught here.

SIBYL: Oh, and I've got you into danger. I never suspected, from the look of you, that you'd have seven children.

GALAHAD: Five.

SIBYL: Well, five. But you mustn't tell your wife.

GALAHAD: Oh, I tell her everything.

SIBYL: She'd be jealous.

GALAHAD: Em, jealous! Um—yes. I don't see quite how I could explain *you*.

SIBYL: You're sworn to secrecy.

GALAHAD: So I am. But there's another thing—I'm in a bank.

SIBYL: Why, my father is a bank-manager.

GALAHAD: You haven't told me your other name, Miss Sibyl.

SIBYL: You haven't told me yours.

GALAHAD: Jones.

SIBYL: Jones—it's hardly the name I would have chosen for a knight.

GALAHAD: My first name is Galahad.

SIBYL: That's better. Galahad——

GALAHAD: Jones!

SIBYL: I shall call you Galahad.

GALAHAD: My wife calls me Gally. But your other name?

SIBYL: Oh—— Hush! There's someone coming! Father, perhaps! If he finds you here——! Quick, hide!

GALAHAD: Oh, if Em found out——!

(*Still with the black bag in his hand.*)

No; I won't go. I'm not afraid—no Galahad ever was. I'll stay by you, and if any man touches a hair of your head——

SIBYL: Stupid! You'll be caught, and put in gaol, and then how will I see Horace again?

GALAHAD: Horace! I was forgetting Horace.

(*He hides behind the summer-house, into which SIBYL goes.*)

MR. BEACH comes down the path, smoking a cigar, and strolls back, and out.

SIBYL: It *was* father. You can't stay here another minute. He'll come back. Quick, over the wall! And you'll bring Horace to-morrow night?

GALAHAD: Not much. I've had enough. Trespassing—it's illegal. And if Em found out——

SIBYL: Oh, and I did think you were my knight.

GALAHAD: You see, it's hard for a bank-clerk to be a knight all at once. A knight with a wife and five children! I've never done this sort of thing before. There's Em——

SIBYL: Em! Em! I'm tired of her.

GALAHAD: Tired? You wait till you've been married to her for twenty years.

SIBYL: I'm sorry I spoke like that. I'm sure she loves you.

GALAHAD: Yes, now I come to think of it, she does.

SIBYL: Then you'll bring Horace? You'll be my knight?

GALAHAD: I'll be your knight—for this one occasion. Good-bye.

SIBYL: Good-bye, *Sir* Galahad.

(*She gives him her hand.*)

GALAHAD: Sir Galahad!

(*He kisses her hand clumsily.*)

SIBYL: Hush! There's father again! I must go!

(*She goes quickly off, up the path.*)

GALAHAD (*left standing in a muse, drops the black bag which he has clutched in his hand since his entrance in to the garden, slowly raises the hand that held hers, and kisses it*): Her knight! *Sir* Galahad!

(*CURTAIN.*)

PICTURE (*on re-raising of curtain*): *GALAHAD notices his dropped bag, picks it up, and turns to go off, up the path—the ordinary bank-clerk once more.*

ACT TWO.

SCENE: *The same as Act One. A day later. Evening. Moonlight, the lamp at the street corner lit, and the windows of the house shining through the trees.*

GALAHAD and EM. appear, strolling down the street. They pause at the waterfront. GALAHAD carries his fishing-rod. Em. is a bulky, commonplace, middle-aged woman, physically bigger than GALAHAD. She has the figure of the usual hard-working wife who has borne many children; but, at heart, as is apparent from the kindly face, she is a good sort—the kind of wife about whose faithfulness her husband need never worry, a good housekeeper, and mother, if a little given to sharp language, and possessed of a hidden vein of childish faith not altogether overlaid by years of work and matrimony. Her stoutish figure is clothed in commonplace garments. She has no money to spend on personal adornment.

EM.: So this is the place where you fish, Gally.

GALAHAD: Yes, there's a lot of fish here.

EM.: Pity you don't bring some home for breakfast.

GALAHAD: You wait. Why, I got a bite here yesterday. A whopper, too.

EM.: You were late enough in for tea, anyhow.

GALAHAD: When I'm fishing, Em., I forget all about tea. I forget about everything.

EM.: I think you often forget about me.

GALAHAD: Em.! Why, I'm your husband!

EM.: That's the trouble. I've been thinking about it since yesterday.

GALAHAD: That's curious. I've been thinking, too.

EM.: There isn't much in marriage, is there? Except children.

GALAHAD: Well, *they're* something, aren't they?

EM.: They are! This is the first minute to-day I've had to myself.

GALAHAD: But, Em., they're worth the trouble.

EM.: Sometimes I wonder. There's that Kathie.

GALAHAD: Kathie! Looking very pale lately. She's not ill, is she?

EM.: No, it's worse. She's in love.

GALAHAD: Kathie in love? Why, she's only seventeen.

EM.: Oh, girls fall in love when they're seventeen.

GALAHAD (*struck, with a look at the wall*): So they do.

EM.: *I* did.

GALAHAD: But I didn't know you then.

EM.: Oh, it was with a man I didn't even know. Just seen him in the street. He never even guessed; but I didn't mind that.

GALAHAD: You never told me, Em.

EM.: Yes, I did—long ago; but you've forgotten.

GALAHAD: Yes, I must have. What a lot of things a fellow forgets when he's married. But who is Kathie in love with?

EM.: That I don't know. She's meeting him secretly—on the street. Most likely he spoke to her on the street.

GALAHAD: Oh Kathie wouldn't let a man do that.

EM.: You never know what a girl of seventeen will do.

GALAHAD: No, that's true.

EM.: All the neighbours are talking. Mrs. Gatters spoke to me about it only this very morning; over the back fence. Nasty, insinuating way she spoke, too. But she isn't blessed with any children, anyhow.

GALAHAD: Well, why shouldn't Kathie have her little romance?

EM.: Gally! Why, I don't even know the man. It's underhand; and Kathie's foolish. Why can't she be above-board, and bring him home to tea of a Sunday, and let me have a look at him. Not her! She's that secretive. I can't think where she gets her underhand ways from. You and I've never had any secrets from each other.

GALAHAD: No, of course not. But why shouldn't the poor child have her little romance?

EM.: What's a girl want with romance?

GALAHAD: Oh, they all want it. We all want it.

EM.: Well, there isn't enough of it in the world to go round.

GALAHAD: I'll speak to her, Em. Probably it is quite innocent—a boy-and-girl affair. She'll confide in me.

EM.: Why not in her mother? But all the children will do anything for their daddy.

GALAHAD: Oh, no. Look here, Em. All to-day at the bank I've been thinking.

EM.: If you do that at the bank you'll lose your job.

GALAHAD: I've been thinking about this marriage business—and you. I've been thinking back. It was the smell of that bit of boronia. It makes me think of the first time we met, don't you remember? when I gave you a bit of boronia. You pinned it in your blouse.

EM.: No. You pinned it in.

GALAHAD: So I did.

EM.: Those were happy times, Gally.

GALAHAD: Yes, and exciting. But now—I don't know how it is, Em., but the—the glow seems to have faded out. The romance has gone.

EM.: I was always one for romance; but there's isn't much time for romance when you're always washing up. But to-night you washed up.

GALAHAD: And I'll always wash up.

EM.: And those kindlings, Gally. It was a surprise.

GALAHAD: You found them cut this morning?

EM.: Yes—oh, it's years and years since you cut up the kindlings for me.

GALAHAD: Well, you'll never have to cut up kindlings any more. And there's other things I might do. Look here, Em., we've drifted into—into a sort of gutter.

EM.: Marriage.

GALAHAD: Yes. It's a muddy stream now, nothing sparkling in it. We've grown too used to each other, Em. We've taken each other too much for granted. And that muddy stream—once it was clear and sunny. Like that little stream in the bush where I asked you.

EM.: I remember. I was wearing my new pink.

GALAHAD: So you were. And didn't you look nice in it!

EM.: I could get another just like it. I saw the same stuff in Brace Brothers the other day; but I bought a new jacket for Gracie instead. She wanted it more than I wanted my pink. And there was a pair of open-work stockings. I've always wanted to get a pair; but there always seems something else to get for the children.

GALAHAD: Em., you get that pink and the open-work stockings

to-morrow, and hang Gracie. I want my wife to look the best-dressed lady in the street.

EM.: But, perhaps, Gally, I'm a bit too—too well developed for pink. My figure——

GALAHAD: Nonsense. A bit filled out perhaps; but just my ideal of a fine, upstanding woman. I hate skinny women.

EM.: My ankles are all right, anyhow; they will look nice in the open-work stockings.

GALAHAD: Yes; and I'm not going to have you stuck in the house all day. Next Saturday I'm going to take you down to Manly.

EM.: A picnic! We haven't been to a picnic since—— Why, I'll get that dress made for it. But, now, Gally, I'm too old and too stout—yes, stout—to go to picnics. That's for Kathie. She believes in romance. We've lived it through. We're only two middle-aged married people who've no time for romance.

GALAHAD: Nobody, Em., grows too old for romance. Why, it's everywhere.

EM.: Oh, yes, over that wall, maybe.

GALAHAD: Over that wall? Yes, and over every wall. And here.

EM.: No, no, Gally. That's faded—like that first sprig of boronia you gave me. Faded——

GALAHAD: But there's plenty more boronia growing. Only we've got out of the way of picking it. There's enough boronia growing in Australia to pin a bit on everybody's blouse. Em., have I been the sort of husband you expected?

EM.: Not quite what I expected, but from what the other ladies in the street tell me about their husbands, I've not got much to grumble about. Only you've got a bit husbandish. All husbands do.

GALAHAD: That's because they forget. Romance is everywhere, wanting to be picked up. Let little Kathie have her share. Afterwards she may grow up and forget. Why, I feel as if the world was full of love, full of lovers kissing their ladies' hands.

(*He takes EM.'S unsuspicious hand.*)

I remember when I first kissed it. And now——

EM.: It's hardened and lined.

GALAHAD: So it is. And I've done that.

EM.: No, Gally, not you. Life's done it.

GALAHAD: No, it's the same hand I first kissed, the same plump soft hand you gave me at your wedding.

(*He kisses it.*)

EM.: Perhaps it is the same.

(*Suddenly suspicious.*)

Whatever made you do that, Gally? It's not like you at all.

(*Her mind working.*)

And you were late home last night, and then those kindlings, and the washing-up. Gally, what's come over you? I know. Oh, the fool I was not to see through all this here talk of romance, all those kindlings. You've gone and fallen in love with someone else, some dreadful creature. It's Remorse, that's what it is. Just Remorse. I've always been frightened that you would not be true to me. I've seen the ladies in the street looking at you. And then they've always seen me looking at *them*—the shameless hussies! And, though I say it myself, I've always been a loving, faithful wife to you, and kept myself respectable—which is more than that Mrs. Gatters, next door, can say, anyhow. Now I see it all. You, and your scent of boronia. Some dreadful creature with yellow hair gave it you. And you've kissed her, I'll be bound. Oh, I know what men are, when their wives aren't about. Mother warned me before I married you. She said you had a roving eye. She said

you were just the sort the women would fall down and worship—and run after. Oh, that I should have married a man who was False!

GALAHAD: Oh, Em., how could you say that!

EM.: Deceiver! Shameless profligate!

(*Suddenly pausing in her distress.*)

Oh, and there's only Kathie at home, and the children in bed, and more than likely Kathie's out in the street meeting her boy, and the house might be on fire. Come on, home, you—you gay Lothario!

GALAHAD (*looks at his watch, then with dignity*): No. I refuse to enter that home till you've apologised for those dreadful aspersions.

EM.: Well, if you're callous and depraved enough to let your children be burnt to death, I'm their mother, and I'll save them. Why I ever married him, I——

(*She goes up the street, hurriedly, still talking.*)

GALAHAD: That settles it. He's late. If he doesn't turn up in ten minutes, I'll clear. No more romance over the wall for me. I've got my reputation as a respectable man to consider, and my position at the bank. Sibyl can see her boy or not; but she'll have to see him without my help.

(*He starts to bait his line.*)

I'll fish for ten minutes, and then I'm off home. Don't expect I'll catch anything—except at home. A married man can't afford to be a knight. It's not safe for a Jones to be a Galahad. Not a married Jones, anyhow.

(*He fishes.*)

PEARL appears in the garden.

PEARL: Miss Sibyl.

SIBYL: Yes.

(*She appears at the door of the summer-house.*)

(*THE BUTCHER, in ordinary clothes, enters the street, sneaks past GALAHAD unobserved, and starts to climb the gate.*)

PEARL: Look out for your father, Miss Sibyl. I just overheard him say he'll be back early to-night.

SIBYL: Just the night that Horace is coming! Hide in the garden and warn me if you hear father coming.

(*As THE BUTCHER climbs the gate, he makes a noise, and GALAHAD looks up and sees him.*)

GALAHAD: Who's that? It's not Horace. She's meeting somebody else too. No; it's a detective. I've had enough.

(*He begins to wind up his line.*)

No. She may be in danger. I'll wait and see.

(*He fishes again.*)

If she calls out, I'll be over that gate in a jiffy.

PEARL (*noticing THE BUTCHER, who is making his way cautiously down the garden*): Oh, Miss, here he is!

SIBYL: Tell him I'm here.

(*She retreats into the summer-house.*)

PEARL: Oh, it's you, Cedric!

BUTCHER: Pearl!

PEARL: Yes, it's me. Haven't forgotten the girl you said you loved, I see. Now, what other lady were you chasing in this garden?

BUTCHER: You, my dear.

PEARL: Garn. I know you. You're a bigamist, though you haven't the pluck to get married even once. Always after the girls.

BUTCHER: They won't leave a chap alone. Chuckin' letters at my feet every day.

PEARL: How did you know, Cedric, that I wrote that letter?

BUTCHER: Reco'nised the handwriting. I would know that fist anywhere. I was wonderin' what had become of you, Pearl. If you're sure there's nobody lookin', you can kiss me.

PEARL: Not on your life, Cedric.

BUTCHER: Well, there's others that don't wait to be asked. If you didn't want to kiss me, Pearl, why did you send me that polite invite?

PEARL: I just wanted to talk straight with you, Cedric, you snake in the grass that gets round trusting women when you deliver the meat. I just wanted to tell you that—that—to-morrow is my night out.

BUTCHER: Let me see, to-morrow? I *was* going out with—but I could put her off. As a matter of fact, when I reco'nised your handwritin' I put her off for to-night. I say, Pearl, what price that summer-house?

(*He puts his arms round her willing waist.*)

PEARL: Ssh! There's somebody in there.

BUTCHER: Another couple?

PEARL: No, a lady, waiting for her bloke.

BUTCHER: 'Ere, what sort of a place is this? Have I got into a lady's school—or what? Anybody waiting for anybody up behind those trees? No? Come on, Pearl.

(*He puts his arm round her waist.*)

PEARL: Cedric, dear, be careful of my blouse! It'll crush!

BUTCHER: My oath, it *will!*

(*They go up the garden path and disappear behind the trees.*)

HORACE LOTHIAN appears in the street.

HORACE: There he is. Fishing! He looks remarkably like that other chap that Kathie said was her father. But there must be heaps of men like her father. Thank heaven, Kathie does not take after him.

GALAHAD: Oh, there you are, Mr. Lothian. You're late.

HORACE: I was choosing a tie.

GALAHAD: I wouldn't have troubled about a tie if I was going to meet a lady.

HORACE: That's just where you've got to. I say, Mr.—what's your name?

GALAHAD: Jones.

HORACE: Jones? That's funny. Oh, Jones is a common name, isn't it?

GALAHAD: Nearly everybody is named Jones.

HORACE: Well, what I want to know is this. You come to my office with a yarn about a lady throwing a letter over a wall, and you make me promise you I'll be here to-night. What business is it of yours?

GALAHAD: The lady made me promise to bring you.

HORACE: And do you go about the world helping ladies in distress?

GALAHAD: I'd like to.

HORACE: Oh, if you're that sort, I suppose it's all right. Is that the wall we've got to climb over?

GALAHAD: There's a gate—locked.

HORACE: I don't fancy this sort of burglary.

GALAHAD: But you're in love with her?

HORACE: Did she say so?

GALAHAD: Yes.

HORACE: Well, it's too risky.

GALAHAD: But you must.

HORACE: Must?

GALAHAD: She'll be heart-broken if you don't.

HORACE: She *is* a dear little kiddie. All right. I'll see her this once.

GALAHAD: I knew you would. Come on.

HORACE: But, climbing that gate? I don't fancy it. It'll ruin my trousers.

GALAHAD: I climbed it yesterday.

HORACE: Oh, you don't have to consider your trousers.

GALAHAD: Haven't I? Those trousers have to last me for another six months. But they won't—after yesterday. Come on.

HORACE: You'll come too—to show me the way?

GALAHAD: No; I must get home.

HORACE: Well, I'm not going wandering about in strange gardens by myself.

GALAHAD: All right, I'll come.

(*Drops his fishing-rod.*)

Em. can wait. It's only this once.

(*They go up to the gate, and climb over, GALAHAD first. GALAHAD leads HORACE to the summer-house, leaves him there, and goes inside. SIBYL is seen to rise and throw her arms about GALAHAD. He backs out, followed by SIBYL, still clinging to him.*)

SIBYL (*recognising him and starting back*): Oh, it's only you!

GALAHAD: I'm so sorry you—you kissed me.

SIBYL: I didn't kiss you. And he hasn't come.

GALAHAD: Here he is!

(*He brings HORACE forward.*)

SIBYL: You, at last!

HORACE: At last! Sibyl!

(*They stand, she looking into HORACE'S eyes.*)

GALAHAD: I'll keep watch. I'll let you know if anybody's coming.

(*He waits—they do not take any notice of him. He goes off irresolutely, up the path, out of sight.*)

SIBYL (*sinking into the seat at the door of the summer-house*): So you've come, Horace. In spite of walls and fathers you come to me. Oh, my brave knight! They wouldn't let me get your letters, dear.

HORACE: What letters?

SIBYL: The ones you wrote to me. I never got them.

HORACE: Oh, those! I wondered why you didn't write.

SIBYL: Father wouldn't let me.

HORACE: But, look here, Sibyl, of course I'm glad to see you again, and all that; but don't you think we'd better not see each other.

SIBYL: Not see each other!

HORACE: Well—for a while. Till your father relents.

SIBYL: He'll never relent.

HORACE: Oh, yes, he will. Wait a few weeks——

SIBYL: A few weeks!

HORACE: Yes, surely we can do without seeing each other for a little while.

SIBYL: A—little—while? Horace, you love me, don't you?

HORACE: Why, of course—that is, I like you awfully.

SIBYL: Oh!

HORACE: I mean, you silly kiddie, I love you.

SIBYL: Not as much as I love you.

HORACE: More! More! As much as this.

(*He kisses her rather perfunctorily.*)

SIBYL: Ah, that makes it all right again. I thought at first you seemed different, colder; but now I know. Why, it wasn't till you kissed me, that day in the Art Gallery, that I even knew I loved you. And I shall love you as long as—as I live.

HORACE: That's a big promise!

SIBYL: No; it's such a little one. And you'll come and see me here!

HORACE: Of course.

SIBYL: Every night.

HORACE: No, Sibyl, I couldn't do that. It's too dangerous; and if your father caught me——!

SIBYL: You're not afraid, Horace?

HORACE: I was thinking of you. Your father wouldn't let you see me again. We must be cautious.

SIBYL: You'll come to-morrow night.

HORACE: No. I can't to-morrow, really. I'm—I'm working back late at the office.

SIBYL: Oh!

HORACE: But the night after. That's only a couple of days.

SIBYL: Two days! Two long days without seeing you!

HORACE: Why, we've got all our lives before us.

SIBYL: Yes, that is why. Two whole days——!

(*GALAHAD comes down the path, hurriedly.*)

GALAHAD: Quick! There's someone coming!

SIBYL: Who?

GALAHAD: A man.

SIBYL: Father! (*To GALAHAD*) What can we do?

GALAHAD (*suddenly taking charge, to HORACE*): Slip over the gate, quick; and you, Miss Sibyl, hide in the summer-house. I'll keep the enemy busy till you can slip away.

(*SIBYL clings to HORACE.*)

No kisses!

(*Tears her from HORACE and packs the frightened youth off. HORACE climbs the gate.*)

(*MR. BEACH appears coming down the path, peering into the bushes. THE BUTCHER breaks out in front of him with PEARL. PEARL dodges back up the path, and THE BUTCHER rushing forward, meets GALAHAD, who waves him back, behind the summer-house.*)

GALAHAD: I'll attract his attention, then over the wall with you!

(*GALAHAD rushes across in front of the astonished BEACH, who at once follows. GALAHAD doubles back, BEACH following, both disappearing among the bushes. THE BUTCHER climbs the wall, sees HORACE ruefully inspecting his trousers, and makes off, followed by HORACE.*)

(*BEACH appears, rushing down to cut off GALAHAD'S escape, and takes up a position on top of the steps. GALAHAD, with clothes all torn and collar flapping, comes rushing down the path, and seeing BEACH, butts him and rolls him over. GALAHAD picks himself up and pauses over the fallen. Then he recognises him.*)

GALAHAD: Mr. Beach! My bank-manager! Could he have recognised me? No. And I've killed him! I hope I have.

(*BEACH moves.*)

No; only stunned. He's safe for a bit.

(*He goes to the summer-house.*)

Miss Sibyl. The way's clear. Slip away to bed.

SIBYL: Oh, Sir Galahad, What have you done?

GALAHAD: I've saved my lady.

SIBYL: And Horace?

GALAHAD: He's safe, you bet. He knows how to look after himself. Off you go.

SIBYL: Oh, thanks. And you'll come again with Horace?

GALAHAD: Horace? No; I've done with Horace.

SIBYL: But what would we have done without you to-night?

GALAHAD: I've had enough. Look at me! I'm off. I've had enough of romance. I'm not the build for it. Good-bye.

SIBYL: You won't help me again? Oh, you're not Sir Galahad at all.

(*She goes up the path.*)

GALAHAD: No, thank God, I'm Jones.

(*EM. appears in the street. Suddenly she recognises the fishing-rod, picks it up and examines it.*)

GALAHAD: He's coming round all right. I've given him a lovely black eye. That just shows that a bank-clerk is as good as his manager, when it comes to man and man. A dashed sight better!

(*Suddenly abashed.*)

But, oh Lord, if he's recognised me!

(*He hurriedly climbs over wall and drops into the street, at EM.'S feet.*)

Em.!

EM.: Gally! What on earth were you doing on that wall?

GALAHAD: Fishing.

EM.: Fishing fiddlesticks! Why your rod's here! And, oh my, look at the state of the man!

GALAHAD: I had a fall.

EM.: Drunk!

(*She puts her face close to his and sniffs.*)

Thank God, it's not drink. What made you climb that wall?

GALAHAD: I thought—it would be easier to fish up there.

EM.: Reprobate! I knew it when you kissed my hand to-night. I knew you were up to no good. That ever a husband of mine——! You've been *over* that wall.

GALAHAD: It's true, Em. I was over the wall.

EM.: To meet a woman?

GALAHAD: No, no. I just felt curious to see what it was like over there, so I climbed over.

EM.: Oh, yes. Romance was over that wall, you said. Chasing romance at this time of night!

GALAHAD: That's why. I thought there would be nobody there.

EM.: You've been meeting some designing creature; that's what you've been doing. And I, that has been a faithful, dutiful wife to you all these years! And just to-day you told me you loved me!

GALAHAD: So I do, Em. More than ever. Why, you can't think of my relief when I saw you waiting for me here. But I'll never climb walls again.

(*He feels his shin.*)

It's too dangerous.

EM.: Why, the man's clothes are in a disgraceful state. And that new suit on that you've only had four months. And where's your watch?

GALAHAD (*feeling anxiously for it—his chain is dangling from his vest-pocket*): It's here all right. But—but my medal's gone!

EM.: Serve you right, you deceiver!

GALAHAD: But, Em, you don't know. Of course, I might have

just lost it; but if *he* took it when I butted him, he could identify me! It's got my name on it.

(*Broken-up, he throws himself on her charity.*)

Em., I've been lying to you.

EM.: And unfaithful to me, too.

GALAHAD: No, Em. Not unfaithful. But I've got into trouble. I've been trespassing, and in a fight, and he knows me, and I'll be arrested, and bound over to keep the peace, and sent to gaol, and I'll lose my job at the bank, and all the street will know I'm a desperate character. Em., I'll never be able to look a policeman in the face.

EM.: I'll stand by you, Gally. Just tell me all about it, and I'll protect you.

GALAHAD: I can't tell you, Em. Except that there was a fight, and I knocked him down——

EM.: You knocked him down? Gally, you?

GALAHAD: Caught him one fair on the eye, and he dropped.

EM.: Was he bigger than you?

GALAHAD: Much. Oh, a giant.

EM.: And you knocked him down!

(*She gloats.*)

Gally, that reminds me of the time, you remember, when we were just engaged, and a larrikin said something to me, and you knocked him over.

GALAHAD: It happened I hit the wrong man, and I had to pay for his hat.

EM.: Yes; but you did it. I was so proud of you that day. And now—was it for a woman?

GALAHAD: Yes.

EM.: What sort of woman? Young? Pretty?

GALAHAD: Em., you must trust in me. I've been a blundering fool, and got into trouble. I've been trespassing and assaulting respectable citizens, and I've lost the medal I got from the Poultry Club, and I'll be identified, and lose my job, and be arrested and put in gaol as a dangerous criminal, and everybody in the street will point the finger of shame at the children whose father is a convict!

EM. (*the mother-instinct conquering*): Let them, if they dare. They'll get as good as they give. If Mrs. Gatters says a word I'll—— Gally, you've got me to look after you, no mattter what crime you've committed. You're my man, and I'm your wife. That's all there is to it. Now, you come straight home with me; and I'll put you to bed and bring up a nice hot supper I've got ready for you; and you'll be all right in the morning. And we'll talk it over, and you'll see things aren't so bad, after all. Any constable that comes to arrest you will have to reach you over my dead body.

GALAHAD: Oh, Em., you'll stick to me?

EM.: Yes. (*Sharply*) I'll stick to you; and if you climb any more walls you'll have to climb 'em with me.

GALAHAD: I've done with climbing walls. I've had enough of romance. Em.! Em.!

(*Overcome, he leans to her and kisses her.*)

EM. (*to the heavens*): Now, what on earth made the man do *that?*

(*CURTAIN.*)

ACT THREE.

The dining-room in GALAHAD'S cottage is a commonplace, oblong room, with tawdry decorations and cheap furniture. A door gives the sole entrance to the room from the hall. There is, of course, the usual sideboard, with cupboard and drawers. The fireplace is surrounded by wood painted to represent gorgeous marble, and an overmantel of bamboo framing small mirrors and supporting flimsy shelves on which is an assortment of futile "ornaments" of china. A dining-table, covered with a white table-cloth, has been half-cleared of the remains of the Sunday tea for the family. Beneath the window, with its cheap lace curtains, is a sewing machine. Chairs are set about.

It being summertime, there is no need yet for lighting the gas.

Over three weeks have elapsed. It is Sunday evening.

GALAHAD is sitting in an easy chair, in his shirt-sleeves, and without any covering to his feet except his socks, reading the Sunday paper. He puts down his paper, satisfied.

GALAHAD: Nothing about burglars in gardens and criminal assaults on bank-managers yet.

(*He takes out Sibyl's letter from his hip pocket and looks at it.*)

"To You!" To me!

(*He reads it through, and with a final shake of his head puts it back into his pocket.*)

Over three weeks ago! How long ago it seems! I wonder how the poor child is getting on?

(*Hearing a sound in the passage he hastily grabs the paper and pretends to read.*)

EM. enters in her Sunday best.

EM.: There! The children are asleep at last.

(*She comes round to the front of table and starts wearily collecting the remaining dishes.*)

GALAHAD: Em.?

EM.: Yes, Gally.

GALAHAD: What are you going to do now?

EM.: Clear these away, of course, and wash up.

GALAHAD: Why can't Kathie do that?

EM.: Oh, Kathie's in her room, doing her hair.

GALAHAD: What's she want to do her hair for?

EM.: I expect she wants to go out, but I'll have a word to say to her about that.

GALAHAD: Don't you think you've done enough work on a sweltering day like this? You sit down and read the paper.

EM.: Likely with all the washing-up to do.

GALAHAD: I'm going to wash up.

(*He rises.*)

EM.: Nonsense!

GALAHAD: I like it.

(*Taking her by the arm and leading here to the easy chair.*)

You haven't been off your feet all day.

EM.: That's true, and they do swell so this hot weather. I'll just give them a rest.

GALAHAD: That's right. Now, I won't be ten minutes, and then we can have a nice long chat.

EM.: What on earth about?

GALAHAD: Oh, about everything.

EM.: Why, we've talked about everything for twenty years, Gally. There isn't much left to talk about, is there?

(*She sits.*)

GALAHAD: No.

EM.: You see we've said all the things we ever wanted to say.

GALAHAD: That's true. Well, here's the paper.

(*He gives her the paper, collects the dishes and takes them out.*)

EM. (*eagerly taking up the paper and reading*): "The wife of Eric Snapper, of a girl." Hm, that makes the eighth—all girls, too. I call it positively indecent. "Marriages." Nobody I ever even heard of—— Ah! "Cheap sale of Corsets! Simply Slaughtered at Ridiculous Prices! Four and elevenpence ha'penny!" And mine won't be worn out till after Christmas—and then corsets will be up again—— So that's the new style of skirt. I wonder how one of these hobbles would suit *me?* At least I've got something to hobble. Ah, here's a society wedding. Why, the bride's dress was something like mine was.

(*Putting down the paper.*)

Now where did I put that clipping about my wedding? I know I kept it.

(*She rises, and searches in the machine drawer.*)

GALAHAD returns, with his wife's apron tied round his waist, and his sleeves rolled up. He begins to collect the remaining dishes.

GALAHAD: What 'v' you lost, Em.?

EM. (*failing to find the clipping in the sewing-machine, she searches the drawers of the sideboard*): I just thought I'd look up the account of our wedding.

GALAHAD: Our wedding!

EM.: Ah, I knew I'd put it away somewhere.

(*She sits examining some papers, and picks up a faded portrait.*)

Why, that's John——! And we haven't been to see his grave for years. What a fat little chap he was, Gally! I always thought he'd grow up the image of you. Ah, well, perhaps he's better off.

(*GALAHAD takes the photograph reverently and gazes at it, then puts it down on her lap.*)

GALAHAD: Poor little chap. Em., we'll go out next Sunday and put some flowers on his grave. Why, we've almost forgotten him, haven't we?

EM.: There, there! That's all over long ago. Somehow I never seem to have time to fret nowadays. The children keep me busy. And yet at the time——

(*Hastily picking up an envelope and taking from it a baby's lock of fair hair.*)

His hair—or perhaps it was Kathie's. No; it looks more like Tottie's. I wonder which it is. Well, well, when you've brought up five you forget.

(*She puts it back into the envelope and picks up a newspaper clipping.*)

Here it is!

(*She reads it, GALAHAD looking at it over her shoulder.*)

It *was* a pretty wedding, wasn't it? "The bride's tall, pretty, rounded figure." Well, nobody calls me tall, nowadays, though I've not shrunk, have I?

GALAHAD: Just filled out a bit, Em. Comfortable looking. Like every other happy married woman.

EM.: Happy? Yes, I suppose that's it. It's worry makes you thin, and I defy everybody to say I ever worried.

(*She puts it down and picks up a ball-program.*)

A ball-program! Gally, fancy me keeping that! Oh!

(*Reading it and pointing it out to GALAHAD.*)

"G.J.," "G.J.," "G.J."—all the way down! Didn't I dance with anybody else that night?

GALAHAD: I know *I* had no other partners.

EM.: I used to just love dances. But they're too heating now. But that night you said I was the lightest dancer in the hall.

GALAHAD: Did I? (*Stoutly*) So you were.

EM.: My marriage lines!

(*Picking up a blue paper.*)

Well, I've got that, anyhow—which is more than certain ladies in this street can say for themselves.

GALAHAD (*leaning over and picking up an envelope*): What's this?

(*He takes out a dried sprig of blossom, and puzzled, smells it.*)

A bit of boronia!

EM.: That very identical sprig of boronia you gave me that day! The one I pinned in my blouse.

(*She eagerly smells it.*)

GALAHAD: No; I pinned it in for you.

EM.: So you did, now I remember. So I kept that—and put it carefully away—and forgot all about it. Well, well, marriage does knock the romance out of you, doesn't it?

(*Looking over the papers.*)

That's all, except some old letters.

GALAHAD: Why, that kettle will be boiling itself dry!

(*He ambles out, taking the remaining dishes with him.*)

EM. (*picking up a bundle of letters, tied with a black boot-lace*): Gally's letters to me? No; I tied them up with a garter. Addressed to "Galahad Jones, Esquire"? A woman's hand! Now, who's been writing to my Gally? And he kept her letters and never told me! Nasty, bold handwriting, too!

(*She unties the lace.*)

The postmark?

(*Relieved.*)

Over twenty years old. Well, *she* must be over forty now. Why, she was writing to him at the very time he was writing to me—the year we were engaged! The deceiver! And all the time I thought I was the only one! I'll see who she was, anyhow!

(*Hurriedly opening the first envelope, and putting it down with a gasp of relief.*)

My letters! My letters to Gally! And I didn't recognise my own handwriting! It's changed out of all recognition. Well, well.

(*With childish delight.*)

So he kept them all—even to this scrap written on a leaf of the prayer-book that I passed to him in church. But how I must have changed, too. Gally must have noticed it. "The lightest dancer in the hall!" And now——! No wonder Gally went climbing walls after strange women.

(*She rises, determinedly.*)

But never again. I'll hold him yet. I'll wear my best blouse—and those open-work stockings. I'll be more fluffy with my hair. Even husbands like fluffy hair—though, of course, it's only untidy hair. I've seen him passing his hand over Kathie's hair. And I've got more hair

than ever Kathie had—hers is mostly pad. And in this hot weather open-work stockings are really much cooler.

(*A crash comes from the kitchen.*)

Heavens!

GALAHAD enters, still in the apron, carrying a broken meat-plate.

GALAHAD: Only the best meat-plate.

EM.: Of all the clumsy——!

GALAHAD: It slipped.

EM.: I'll finish the things myself. You can't trust a man——!

GALAHAD: I've finished 'em—all except this.

EM.: Hang up the dish-cloth to dry?

GALAHAD: Yes.

EM.: Turned out the gas?

GALAHAD: Yes.

EM.: Oh, well. Wonder you didn't wake the children. I'll just go and make sure. Of all the noisy, clumsy——!

(*She goes off, taking the broken dish, muttering.*)

GALAHAD (*with a despairing gesture*): What's the use? What's the use of trying to be romantic.

(*He lights the gas.*)

KATHIE comes in, in underskirt and slip-bodice, with her hair half-done, the pad showing.

KATHIE: Father. Mum says I can't go out to-night. And I promised to go for a walk. And I'm nearly dressed! I can, can't I?

GALAHAD: You must do as your mother tells you, Kathie.

KATHIE: Well, you don't.

GALAHAD: What do you want to go out for?

KATHIE: Just a stroll—it's so hot inside.

GALAHAD: Who with?

KATHIE: Oh, a girl. It's pretty dull at home, isn't it?

GALAHAD: Is it? Um—— I suppose it is. But if your mother says——

KATHIE: Oh, mother! What does she know of—of romance!

GALAHAD: More than you do, child. Why, when she was in love with me——

KATHIE: Mum in love with you, father? It seems ridiculous, doesn't it?

GALAHAD: What is funny in a girl being in love with me?

KATHIE: Oh, I didn't mean that, father. Only, if I fell in love it would be with a man that—oh, big and strong and beautiful, with a stern chin and nice creased trousers. But I can never believe that you and Mum could be really in love, like I could be. Of course, you *liked* each other; but in love, passionately in love—— I can't help it, father, it does seem funny.

GALAHAD: Not at all. Why, we are in love with each other now.

KATHIE: Well, you don't show it.

GALAHAD: No—perhaps we don't need to.

KATHIE: It's not what I call love. I don't think people *can* be in love when they're married. I'd like a man to be in love with me always, and I'd never marry him. Just keep him wretched, and spurn him. Oh, here's Mum! I can go out to-night, can't I?

EM. returns.

EM.: That you can't, so there! (*To GALAHAD*) She's going out to meet a man.

KATHIE: No; it's a girl.

EM.: Fiddlesticks!

KATHIE: I simply must go. I promised. Father!

EM.: Father!

GALAHAD (*uneasily*): Settle it yourselves.

EM.: No. You must put your foot down.

KATHIE (*putting her arms round GALAHAD*): Father, if you don't let me go now I'm nearly dressed, I'll——

(*She weeps.*)

EM.: Oh, if she cries, I know how it will end.

GALAHAD: There, there, Kathie, don't cry. You'll spoil your pretty eyes. You can go out to-night, as you've promised; it'll be cooler outside; but you must be in by ten.

KATHIE (*instantly stopping her tears*): Oh, you're a dear old dad. I can understand *anybody* being in love with you. I'll promise to be in by ten. And I've only just got time to finish dressing.

(*She runs off blithely.*)

EM.: That's so like a man. A woman has only to cry. And she's off to meet a man.

GALAHAD: That's why I let her go.

EM.: Of all the——! But the lies she told, saying it was a girl.

GALAHAD: Em., don't you remember how hard it was for you to get out at night to meet me? Don't you remember the yarns you told *your* mother?

EM.: Oh, that's different.

GALAHAD: Everything's different when you forget.

EM.: But why can't she confide in her mother?

GALAHAD: Oh, this little secret of hers is the best part of the fun for her. Don't you remember how proud we were of our cleverness in keeping our great secret to ourselves?

EM.: It *was* great fun. And we found out afterwards that mother knew all the time. I expect we're getting old, Gally. We've forgotten so much. It does seem hard for us to keep Kathie in at nights. It's different with us.

GALAHAD: Yes, we've had our little romance. Let Kathie have hers.

EM.: Romance! The man's always prating about romance. And I should think you've had enough of romance—that night, over three weeks ago, with the cold you caught climbing walls.

GALAHAD: Well, nothing happened, you see. Nobody's said a word. There's nothing in the paper about trespass and assaulting people in their gardens. I must have lost my medal before I got over that wall. And the policeman gave me quite a friendly nod the other morning.

EM.: Well, whatever it was, it's been a lesson to you. I notice you haven't suggested going fishing again.

GALAHAD: No; I've had enough of fishing. I'm glad it's all blown over. Do you know, Em., for a fortnight after, every time I heard a knock at the door I thought it was a policeman coming to arrest me.

(*A loud double-knock sounds.*)

GALAHAD: A knock! Somebody at the door—at this hour! Oh, Em., if I've been found out! If it's a policeman with handcuffs!

EM.: Nonsense! I'll look after you. I'd just like to see a policeman arrest you. You'd better go and see who it is.

(*The knock is repeated.*)

GALAHAD: No. I daren't. You go.

EM.: Yes. I'll go. I'll send a dozen policeman packing.

(*She goes.*)

(*GALAHAD, waiting in suspense, suddenly discovers he has the apron on, and tears it off.*)

EM. enters.

EM.: It's a man, a strange man—not in uniform.

GALAHAD: A detective? Oh, bring him in.

EM. does so, returning with THE BUTCHER. He is in ordinary clothes, and is vigorously mopping his perspiring face.

BUTCHER: Mr. Jones? 'Streuth, if it ain't the bloke I met in the garden!

GALAHAD: My name is Jones.

BUTCHER: It's your son, then, I want. Galahad Jones.

GALAHAD: My son's name isn't Galahad. I'm Galahad Jones.

BUTCHER: You! A man of your age! Married, too, and a family! I'm surprised at yer!

EM.: There, I knew he was deceiving me.

GALAHAD: What do you want to see me about?

BUTCHER: I'd better see you (*with a look at EM.*) in private.

EM.: Are you a detective?

BUTCHER: Lord, no. I'm a butcher.

EM.: Oh. I'm not one to stay where my company isn't wanted. Remember, if you want help, Gally, I'm just in the kitchen.

(*She makes a dignified exit.*)

BUTCHER: You're the bloke orl right. You're the one I saw in the garden that night the old bloke chased us. Oh, and you were in that there summer-house with that there piece! Old enough to be 'er father! Wimmen are funny. But I won't give yer away, old chap. I'm seein' a piece of skirt in that there garden meself. Honor among thieves, eh!

GALAHAD: What's your message—quick?

BUTCHER: Only this.

(*He produces a letter.*)

Chucked over the garden wall to me yesterday as I was deliverin' the meat. They're always throwin' their love-letters at me feet; but when I opened this one I found another envelope inside, addressed to you. Orl she wrote to me was a note telling me to deliver it, for God's sake, at once. I couldn't find out your private address till this afternoon.

GALAHAD: Yes; it's her handwriting. Take a seat.

(*GALAHAD opens the letter and reads.*)

"My brave knight!"

(*Rapidly he scans it and is overcome with consternation.*)

My God—to die! (*Anxiously, to THE BUTCHER*) Look here. What am I to do?

(*GALAHAD reads.*)

"My Brave Knight,—I haven't seen Horace since that night. He must be ill. And soon—very soon—it will be too late. That day I first met you I overheard the doctor tell father that I had only three weeks to live. The three weeks were up on Friday, and I feel that the doctor was right. But I cannot die without seeing Horace once more. You must bring him to me to-morrow night—at all costs it must be to-morrow night. I have been getting weaker and weaker. But it is my anxiety about Horace that is killing me. If I can only see him I shall be all right again. So I must again appeal to you, the only person who can help me, my knight, my Sir Galahad!—SIBYL."

BUTCHER: The poor kid's going to die! And I thought you and her——!

GALAHAD: That Horace! The cad! Never been to see her. The

brute! And she's dying for the sight of him. Oh, and I don't even know his private address. And it's Sunday! Look here. You and I are the only friends she's got. You've got to help me to find that cad.

BUTCHER: Right-oh! Poor little kid. What's his other name?

GALAHAD: Lothian. He's in Blough's warehouse. But how can we find out his private address? No; it's hopeless. I'll tell you what. I'll go to-night, and keep her alive on lies till to-morrow, and then we'll bring Horace to the garden—he can't love her if he won't see her—and make him swear he loves her.

BUTCHER: But—over three weeks!

GALAHAD: Doctors don't know everything. It's her love that's keeping her alive. It's her love that will save her yet. Meet me to-night at eight o'clock at the end of the lane. I'll want you in case anything happens.

BUTCHER: Right-oh. I'm on. Eight o'clock? So long.

(*THE BUTCHER departs.*)

(*GALAHAD sees him out and returns, calling as he enters.*)

GALAHAD: Em.!

EM. comes in.

EM.: Well?

GALAHAD: I've got to go out in half-an-hour. I've got an important appointment.

EM.: Fishing?

GALAHAD: Er—yes.

EM.: Over walls, I suppose? Well, Gally, you're not going.

GALAHAD: But I tell you I must. It's a matter of life and death.

EM.: I've heard that yarn before. You're going to meet that creature with the chemical hair that lives in a garden and gets married men into trouble. I won't have it, so there!

GALAHAD: Em. You must trust me to-night.

EM.: Oh, I'll trust you all right; but I won't give you your boots!

GALAHAD: My boots!

(*He looks at his socks.*)

You wouldn't keep my boots?

EM.: Oh, wouldn't I? I'm going to save you from yourself, Gally. I'm going to save you from a life of sin.

GALAHAD: Em.!

EM.: You can't go out meeting a creature with chemical hair in your socks. If you want your boots, you'll have to climb over my dead body.

GALAHAD: Em!

EM.: I'll go and lock 'em up now.

(*She pauses as a knock comes to the door.*)

Who's that?

GALAHAD: It's the policeman. But I don't care now.

EM.: Well, I'll go and see. I'd rather see you handcuffed than in your boots.

(*She goes out and returns, showing in MR. BEACH.*)

GALAHAD: Mr. Beach!

BEACH: Yes, Mr. Jones. I've come to see you on an important matter—alone.

EM. (*protectingly putting a hand on GALAHAD'S shoulder*): We are one.

GALAHAD: Em., this is Mr. Beach, my bank manager. Mr. Beach —my wife.

(*BEACH shakes her hand.*)

EM.: Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Beach. I thought you were a detective. (*To GALAHAD*) Anyhow, I'll lock up them boots.

(*She goes out.*)

GALAHAD: Please sit down, Mr. Beach.

BEACH: I've a little matter to discuss with you.

GALAHAD: Wouldn't it do to-morrow at the office, sir?

BEACH: It won't wait.

(*Producing a silver medal.*)

Do you recognise this?

GALAHAD: It—it looks rather like a medal.

BEACH: Usen't you to wear a medal on your watch-chain?

GALAHAD: Yes; but I—I must have lost it.

BEACH: And I've found it. You will not venture to deny that this is yours. I see by the inscription that it was bestowed by "The Poultry Society of Sydney, 1894, to Galahad Jones, Second Prize in Buff Orpingtons."

(*He hands it to GALAHAD.*)

GALAHAD: Yes, it's my poultry medal. I used to go in for Buff Orpingtons, sir. I'm very pleased that you found it, sir. I value it very much. It's the only medal I ever won. Thank you, sir.

BEACH: And now, Mr. Jones, will you kindly explain how this Buff Orpington medal was found in my garden?

GALAHAD: I'm afraid, sir, I cannot explain.

BEACH: Listen, Mr. Jones. Some scoundrel knocked me down in my own garden one night three weeks ago. I could not identify him at the time. But the finding of this medal this morning explains it. It must have been you, though I thought it was a bigger man. What were you doing in my garden that night, and why did you so savagely assault your manager?

GALAHAD: I would tell you, sir, if only I were concerned. But I've been sworn to secrecy. For the sake of—of the other party I cannot speak.

BEACH: You mean you won't. Very well, Mr. Jones. I could have you arrested and punished for trespass and assault.

GALAHAD: I know it, sir.

BEACH: And you refuse to explain!

GALAHAD: You can put me in gaol, Mr. Beach; but I cannot break my solemn oath.

BEACH (*leaning back in his chair with a gesture of defeat, then in a tone of appeal*): Now, Mr. Jones, I must tell you why I ask this explanation. I ask it. I do not demand it. My daughter—my only daughter—is seriously ill. The doctors say that her only chance—not of life, but of slight prolongation of life—is perfect seclusion and quiet. Any excitement would be at once fatal. So, as her father, I must protect her from any possibility of shock. She had a foolish love-affair—a childish infatuation—which I had to stop.

GALAHAD: Why, sir?

BEACH: God knows, now that she is so soon to go from me; I would give in to her in everything, but the doctor told me that with her excitable temperament it would be criminal to let her see her lover again.

GALAHAD: Who is he, sir? What's his address?

BEACH: I don't even know his name. I must keep her as long as I can. And each day she gets weaker. She is slipping away from me each hour. And there is something behind all this, something I know nothing about, something that threatens—— I am in the dark, horribly in the dark. She had told me nothing; and I dare not excite her by questioning her. Your presence in my garden that night might

have killed her. Won't you help me, now—to save her—a little while longer?

GALAHAD: No, no, Mr. Beach. She confided her little secret in me; she picked me out of all the world to succor her; and she made me swear to keep her secret. I am responsible only to her. Can't you trust me, sir, to act for the best, for her best?

BEACH: But, man, the thing is serious. There's not a moment to waste. She does not know how soon she must die.

GALAHAD: She *does* know.

BEACH: She knows! Knows that perhaps she hasn't another day to live?

GALAHAD: She overheard the doctor tell you three weeks ago.

BEACH: She knew then? She knows now?

GALAHAD: She knows.

BEACH: But—how do *you* know?

GALAHAD: She told me.

BEACH: She knew all the time, and I have kept even a hint of it from her!

GALAHAD: Was that wise, sir? To keep her in ignorance, and let her little life slip away without her knowledge? To let her last days go by in commonplace things? There must have been so much she wanted to do, so many last messages to send, so many friends to see. And you would let her go into the dark, like a train into the blackness of a tunnel? Mr. Beach, was she happy?

BEACH (*almost collapsing into his chair*): Happy? God knows I meant her to be happy. I did right—surely I did right?—not to tell her the truth. And she knew—and never told me. All the time she had that dreadful secret to carry by herself—and I might have helped her. She seemed so happy, so ignorantly happy. She had some other secret against which even the knowledge of her death was powerless. How could she be so happy—and dying?

GALAHAD: She was happy—and living! She may have been living these last days to the utmost, getting out of every minute a year of the fullest life.

BEACH: But what have you to do with my daughter? For God's sake, tell me what you know. How can I go on in the dark?

GALAHAD: No. I can't trust you to do what is best for Sybil. You would spoil it all. You do not understand. Till she releases me, I must do what I think best.

BEACH: Then I'll fight you—in the dark. You'll take the consequences.

GALAHAD: I must, sir.

BEACH: I could have you gaoled!

GALAHAD: You won't get anything out of me, sir.

BEACH: Of course, in my daughter's position, I can't risk any publicity. But I can punish you, and prevent you interfering with my daughter's one chance of life.

GALAHAD: Yes, sir.

BEACH: I shall be obliged, Mr. Jones, if you would send in your resignation from the bank—at once.

GALAHAD: Certainly, sir.

BEACH: And I've taken steps to prevent anyone entering my garden again. The gate's kept locked, and the walls have broken bottles on them. Good-night.

GALAHAD: Good-night, sir. I'll show you out.
(*He does so.*)

EM. returns.

EM.: It's a rise! He's given Gally a rise!

GALAHAD returns.

GALAHAD: It's all up, Em. I'm dismissed from the bank, got the chuck.

EM.: Dismissed?

GALAHAD: Yes. That was the man I knocked over.

EM.: Your manager? You knocked Mr. Beach down?

GALAHAD: And blacked his eye.

EM. (*embracing him with pride*): My noble Gally! I always knew that you could fight. Oh, the whole street shall hear of it!

GALAHAD: But I've got to send my resignation in to-morrow.

EM.: What's that matter? You're too good for a bank. Why they haven't given you a rise for six years. You can get another job.

GALAHAD: At my age? And all I know is how to count cancelled bank-notes.

EM.: Well, *I'll* work. We'll take that little shop at the corner.

GALAHAD: Shop-keeping? I say, Em., that's hardly respectable.

EM.: You talk of respectability, going round blacking people's eyes! Oh, we'll manage somehow.

GALAHAD: Em! Em! (*Kissing her.*) And—I won't want my boots to-night.

EM.: Oh! My own!
(*She returns his kiss.*)

KATHIE enters, dressed for going out, in her Sunday best.

KATHIE: Kissing! Mum, I *am* surprised. It doesn't seem decent, somehow.

EM. (*shamefully standing apart*): Nothing to be ashamed of, is there?

KATHIE: I've never seen you do it before. Father, I've just run in to thank you for letting me go out. Do I look nice?

GALAHAD: Very trim, Kathie.

KATHIE: Trim! Oh, Lor'!

GALAHAD: Well—pretty; but my girl is always pretty.

KATHIE: Pretty! Do I look *smart?*

GALAHAD: Smart? Of course, you always do.

EM.: Fine feathers! You spend every penny on your back. (*Softening*) And even that's undone. Come here.
(*She buttons up KATHIE'S blouse.*)
Now, you be in by ten.
(*Suddenly struck.*)
Oh, and I forgot to boil the milk.

KATHIE: You haven't said a word about my hat.

GALAHAD: Very trim—I mean smart.

KATHIE: It *is* smart, isn't it? I trimmed it myself. It's a second-hand model. I'll give you a kiss for liking it, father.
(*She does so.*)
And now, as you've let me go out to-night, I'll tell you something. It is a man I am going to meet. He's in love with me; and I—oh, any girl simply couldn't help loving him. He's so nice and well-dressed—and always wears his trousers turned up.

GALAHAD: He really loves you, Kathie?

KATHIE: He asked me to marry him as soon as he gets a rise in his screw.

GALAHAD: Who is he?

KATHIE: Oh, I don't think I could tell you his name yet. I don't think Horace would——

GALAHAD (*springing up*): Horace? Is his name Horace?

KATHIE: I suppose I must tell you. It's such an aristocratic-sounding name. Horace Lothian.

GALAHAD: Horace Lothian! In love with my Kathie!

KATHIE: Yes; he's bringing the ring to-night.

GALAHAD: Bringing you the ring?

KATHIE: Why, father, whatever's come over you. You don't mean to say that you know anything against Horace?

GALAHAD: Where are you to meet him?

KATHIE: At the end of the street, where you used to fish.

GALAHAD: When?

KATHIE: At eight o'clock. Why it must be nearly that now.

GALAHAD: Kathie, you can't see him to-night. I'll go instead.

KATHIE: Oh, no!

GALAHAD: It's my duty to see whether he's the right sort for my Kathie to marry. I've heard something about him carrying on with another girl.

KATHIE: Oh, he told me all about that. Her name's Sibyl; she's in love with him, but he's not in love with her. Besides he hasn't seen her for a month, and he's promised me not to see her ever again.

GALAHAD: I must see him. I can't have any harm come to my Kathie. I daresay it'll be all right, and if it is I'll tell him that he can call here to-morrow night for you. Now, it's only one day, Kathie.

KATHIE: But he's got the ring, and I don't even know whether it's pearls yet!

(*She weeps.*)

GALAHAD: He'll bring it to-morrow. And I'll be back before ten. Wait up and I'll bring a message to you.

KATHIE: Oh, well, I suppose I must.

GALAHAD (*suddenly determined*): Em!

EM. comes in.

GALAHAD: My boots!

EM.: Your boots?

GALAHAD: I said boots.

EM.: You're not going out, after all? Now that you've lost your job and everything?

GALAHAD: Nothing matters now. I'm not a bank-clerk any more. I'm Galahad—*Sir* Galahad. And if anybody opposes me, I'll—I'll knock 'em down!

EM.: Lord! Whatever's come over the man! It's the heat.

GALAHAD: I've got my duty to do. I'm going out to interview Kathie's young man. Kathie will stay with you. My boots!

EM.: Gally, I don't believe you. You're going out to meet that creature with the chemical hair.

GALAHAD: My boots!

(*KATHIE slips out.*)

EM.: Never. Except over my dead body.

GALAHAD: Well, if it must be murder, you've brought it on yourself. Woman, I have a secret duty to fulfil. Not all the wives in Elizabeth Bay would hinder me.

(*Magnificently, with lifted arm.*)

My boots!

EM. (*suddenly capitulating in affright*): Oh, Gally, if you really want them, of course——

KATHIE comes in with the boots.

EM. (*taking them from KATHIE*): Here they are. Nicely polished, too.

GALAHAD (*seizing them, sitting in the chair, and putting one boot on*): Now!

EM. (*timidly coming and bending over him*): Gally, let me lace them up for you.

GALAHAD: Tie that one quick.

(*EM. kneels in front of him and does so. He is meantime lacing the other.*)

My coat and hat!

(*EM. goes for them.*)

(*To KATHIE*) At the end of the street, you said?

(*Looks at his watch.*)

At eight? Why, it's that now.

EM. enters, with GALAHAD'S coat and hat. She puts the coat on, then the hat, straightens it lovingly, and caressingly settles his tie.

EM.: You'll want your stick, won't you?

GALAHAD: No. I can use my fists. (*Proudly*) *Sir* Galahad!

(*He goes out.*)

EM.: My Gally! How noble he looked! He looked like that on our wedding day! The Queen of England would fall in love with him!

(*Suddenly suspicious.*)

Yes—and other women—women with chemical hair! Quick, Kathie! We're going out, too. Get my hat—the picture hat, and my dress-bag. It's too hot for gloves.

KATHIE: Why, mum, where're we going?

EM. (*grimly*): After father!

(*CURTAIN.*)

ACT FOUR.

The scene is the same as Act Two, except that now the garden wall is topped with broken bottles, and the gate has been made impregnable with iron spikes. And in the garden, near the summer-house, there is a dog's kennel.

It is moonlight, the same evening. The lamp at the corner is lit, and a few windows of the house glow through the trees.

HORACE comes down the street, looks round, takes out his watch, looks impatiently up the street, and generally shows all the anxiety of the ardent lover waiting for his girl. It is evidently a sweltering night, judging from the way he wipes his forehead.

During the following scene in the garden, he waits about, wanders up the street and back again, and gives evidence of his growing impatience at the non-arrival of KATHIE.

MR. BEACH and THE DOCTOR appear in the garden.

BEACH: Doctor, I've just heard something that you should hear before you see Sibyl.

DOCTOR: How is she, this hot night?

(*He mops his face.*)

BEACH: Wonderful—but she knows.

DOCTOR: Knows that she is going to die?

BEACH: Knew all along. She was in this summer-house when you told me—over three weeks ago.

DOCTOR: Why, that was enough to kill her.

BEACH: No; there was something else that kept her alive.

DOCTOR: What?

BEACH: She's in love.

DOCTOR: That childish love-affair. But you stopped it?

BEACH: I thought I had. But it has been going on ever since she heard.

DOCTOR: Not getting letters from him, surely?

BEACH: She's been meeting him here, at night—when we thought her in bed.

DOCTOR: But how did you find out?

BEACH: Sibyl has just told me. She felt it was wrong to go on deceiving me. She said she could not die with that deceit on her soul. She is to meet her lover here, to-night, in a few minutes.

DOCTOR: Well, we can prevent that, anyhow.

BEACH: Why?

DOCTOR: The excitement——

BEACH: Doctor, she's been living on excitement for the last three weeks. That has buoyed her up. You gave her three weeks——

DOCTOR: At the utmost. I thought it would be sooner.

BEACH: Well, it's her love affair, I see now, that has kept her alive.

DOCTOR: Um—yes. I have known cases like that, but——

BEACH: Doctor, I want your permission to let Sibyl see him to-night. I didn't know. I thought I was acting for the best. Oh, if only I had known at the beginning! How I would have helped her! Doctor, you said there was one chance for her. Sibyl has taken it. You said that the only chance was a miracle. Here it is. The miracle is Love!

DOCTOR: Love? Ah, that's out of my line. Still, to expose her to the excitement——

BEACH: To give her the shock of a disappointment! Why, she is only living on the chance of seeing him again! And all the time I was killing her. But, thank God, there was one man who stood by her.

DOCTOR: Her lover, of course.

BEACH: No; she hasn't even told him.

DOCTOR: Then who?

BEACH: A stranger to her. She threw over a letter to him, and he has helped her, sacrificed himself, and all his prospects for her. He's a hopeless sort of middle-aged clerk in my bank. And only this night I dismissed him. But I'll make it up to him. I'll give him promotion. He has saved my child's life.

DOCTOR: Not yet, Mr. Beach.

BEACH: Well, he has given her a few weeks of happiness. That's a debt I shall spend all my life repaying.

DOCTOR: I've done all I can. Let her meet him. If we don't, the disappointment may end it. There's just the bare possibility of the miracle. But we must be here—in case.

BEACH: We'll hide in the summer-house.

DOCTOR: But how does he get here?

BEACH: Over that wall, or over the gate.

DOCTOR: But those broken bottles and the spikes on the gate?

BEACH: I put them there, not knowing. I even got a dog (*pointing to the kennel*). But to-night the kennel is empty, and the gate unlocked. He'll be here any minute now.

(*They enter the summer-house.*)

GALAHAD hurries down the street.

GALAHAD (*seeing HORACE*): Mr. Lothian!

HORACE: Mr. Jones!

GALAHAD: You're waiting for Kathie.

HORACE: How did you know that?

GALAHAD: She's my daughter.

HORACE: Kathie—your daughter? I knew her name was Jones, of course; but then it's such a common name.

GALAHAD: That's all right. I wouldn't let Kathie come to-night. I wanted to ask you some questions. Do you love her?

HORACE: Oh, yes, honest, I do. I've asked her to marry me.

GALAHAD: What about Sibyl?

HORACE: Sibyl? Oh, that was nothing. I've not seen her since that night in the garden. Really, Mr. Jones, there was nothing in that. She likes me, and I—I thought at first it was good fun. But then I met Kathie——

GALAHAD: But Sibyl loved you.

HORACE: She thought she did. So did I till the real thing came. I'm sorry if Sibyl's taken it seriously, really, and I was to blame at first. But how could I know I was going to meet Kathie? When I met her I decided not to see Sibyl again, but you made me. But you needn't fear I'll ever see her again.

GALAHAD: You must—to-night.

HORACE: Why, when I love Kathie! No, I'm hanged if I do.

GALAHAD: Sibyl is dying.

HORACE: Dying—Sibyl? It's—it's impossible. You're kidding me.

GALAHAD: For all I know we may be too late. She must see you once before she dies—to-night.

HORACE: No; not even once. What if Kathie found out?

GALAHAD: She won't. You've got Kathie all your life. Sibyl

has only to-night. Give her this night. She loves you. She passionately believes you love her. That belief has kept her alive. Let her die happy in her illusion. If you don't see her now, she'll guess the truth; and that will kill her. All I ask is that you keep up the pretence one night longer. After that—it will be too late.

HORACE: No, Mr. Jones. You have no right to ask me to pretend to love her.

GALAHAD: It will be easy—with her great belief in you. You could not be so cruel as to snatch her last illusion from her.

HORACE: Sibyl—to die. Poor little kiddie! If it had been Kathie!

GALAHAD: If it had been Kathie, could you undeceive her just at the last? Wouldn't you—at whatever cost to yourself—have let her go to the end with her illusion? Perhaps it is too late now. Perhaps she will never come to the summer-house again. Give up this one hour to her.

HORACE: Poor little kiddie! I'll go.

GALAHAD: I knew you would. The wall—those broken bottles! We'll try the gate.

(*He moves up to the gate, followed by HORACE.*)

Why, it's got iron spikes on it. We'll never get over.

HORACE: Oh, we must now.

(*They try to climb the gate.*)

THE BUTCHER appears in the street.

(*He is carrying something wrapped up in a newspaper.*)

BUTCHER: Wot oh! Go slow. There's a dorg.

GALAHAD: A dog!

HORACE: Come on. I'm not afraid of a bite.

BUTCHER: I've brought a little present for the dorg. Dorg's meat. I always carries it when I'm out love-making at night. It sort of smoothes the way.

(*Wiping his face.*)

Whew! It's hot. Hell with the lid off. Wish that southerly would come along.

GALAHAD: But how are we to get over the gate?

BUTCHER: I suppose it's locked all right?

GALAHAD: Never tried.

BUTCHER (*He tries the gate and opens it*): It's not even locked.

GALAHAD: That's curious. I don't like it. It's a trap. There's a policeman inside.

BUTCHER: You leave the policeman and the dorg to me. I'm accustomed ter dealing with 'em.

GALAHAD: I was forgetting. I've nothing to lose now. Come on.

(*The three enter the gate.*)

(*As they are doing so, EM. and KATHIE appear in the street, and come stealthily down.*)

EM.: They went in here.

(*Fanning herself with the bag.*)

My, but it's hot work chasing deceivers on a night like this.

KATHIE: Mother, that was Horace with him!

EM.: Horace? Who's Horace?

KATHIE: My boy! Oh, and he asked me to marry him, and out on the loose with father!

EM.: My Kathie, don't worry yet. There may be an explanation. If not, there'll be two hearts broken to-night—(*vindictively*)—and one head.

(*They enter the gate.*)

(*THE BUTCHER, GALAHAD and HORACE, who have made their way slowly and cautiously through the trees, now come down the path, THE BUTCHER leading. They stop at the kennel.*)

BUTCHER: The dorg!

GALAHAD: You go.

BUTCHER: Right-oh!

(*He takes his parcel of meat and approaches the kennel.*)

Goo' dorggie! Goo' dorggie!

(*He looks in the kennel.*)

Nobody at home. Right-oh!

(*GALAHAD and HORACE come up and look in the kennel. While they are doing so, EM. and KATHIE come quickly but quietly down the path, and conceal themselves in the shrubs.*)

GALAHAD: That's funny. I don't like it.

HORACE: Is she in the summer-house?

GALAHAD: No; she would have heard us and come out.

(*THE BUTCHER looks into the summer-house, and draws back with a start of surprise, but says nothing.*)

GALAHAD (*to BUTCHER*): We'll hide over there. She mustn't see us.

(*He leads the way down the steps.*)

HORACE: I'll wait here.

(*He waits near the kennel.*)

BUTCHER: I say, boss. Do you know there's two blokes sittin' in that there summer-house?

GALAHAD: No! Two men?

BUTCHER: 'Tecs, they looked like.

GALAHAD: Did they see you?

BUTCHER: Must have. But they didn't say nothink.

GALAHAD: Policemen! I knew it was a trap. I'm going to find out.

(*He pauses as he looks up the path from the bottom of the steps.*)

Ah! Sibyl!

(*A white figure drifts down the path. It is SIBYL, deathly white, clad in a wrap of lacy lightness. She comes slowly down, almost too weak to walk, and pausing at the top of the steps, sees HORACE.*)

SIBYL: Horace! At last!

(*She goes quickly to him, and embraces him.*)

I knew you would come, dearest. And now it's all right. Kiss me.

(*HORACE unwillingly kisses her.*)

KATHIE (*starting forward, to EM., in a whisper*): Horace! Mother, my heart's breaking, breaking!

EM. (*her arms around KATHIE*): Hush, child. It was better that you should know. Hush, dear. I'll look after you. But why that good-for-nothing father of yours doesn't stop it, I don't know. Wait; we'll see it out.

(*She draws KATHIE back to her arms.*)

SIBYL: You did not come, and I have waited so many nights; but ah! it was worth while waiting for to-night.

HORACE: Really, Sibyl, I couldn't come before. I couldn't get in.

SIBYL: Three weeks! Three long weeks of waiting. I was afraid

you would be too late. Oh, my love, my sweet, how I love you. Dearest, I am all yours, take me!

(*She lies in his arms.*)

GALAHAD (*to the BUTCHER*): How tired she looks! It must be very near now. Thank God we came in time!

BUTCHER: Say, boss, feel that breeze? It's the southerly comin' at last!

GALAHAD: Ah, the southerly. Thank God! The coolness will revive her.

SIBYL (*with a puzzled look, lifts her head and gazes long into HORACE'S eyes*): But you're different to-night, Horace. There's a coldness in your eyes.

HORACE (*attempting to draw her head down on his shoulder*): No; no; you're imagining. You're wrought up to-night. It's just the heat. If only the southerly would come!

SIBYL: Swear that you love me, more, more!

HORACE: More, Sibyl, more than I ever dreamed of loving!

KATHIE (*to EM., heart-brokenly*): Oh, Mother! Mother!

(*EM. comforts her.*)

GALAHAD: Good boy, he's playing his part!

SIBYL: Oh, how could I ever have doubted you! But the long, long waiting! My heart cried out so for you, my dearie! But now, with your strong arms about me, Horace, I know how foolish my heart was. I've—I've not been very well, dearest; and I seemed to need you so much more. I thought that only your strong arms could hold me up, only your strength could keep me from Death. But now——!

(*Breathing deep and looking up.*)

Did you feel that cool kiss on your cheek, Horace? It's the good southerly at last! A breath of coolness, a word from the great world outside has come over the wall into this stifling garden. Ah, it's good. It's like a breath of truth in a hot-house world of make-believe.

(*Suddenly straightening up.*)

I see the truth.

(*With a sudden cold suspicion.*)

You do not love me any more. Horace, I know! I see clear!

(*HORACE stiffens himself as if to speak, but with a despairing gesture, restrains himself, and attempts to draw her closer.*)

SIBYL (*with an agony of doubt in her voice*): You don't say you love me. You cannot say it! You cannot!

HORACE: I cannot, Sibyl!

KATHIE (*incredulous, to EM.*): Ah; it's me he loves!

EM.: Hush, hush!

HORACE: Oh, forgive me, Kiddie, but I cannot. I have tried not to let you know, tried to keep up the make-belief, for your dear sake. Mr. Jones made me, for your sake. But this southerly has cleared the air. I cannot go on deceiving you. You would not want me to go on lying, Sibyl? You could not!

(*BEACH appears at the door of the summer-house, followed by THE DOCTOR. BEACH attempts to go to SIBYL, but THE DOCTOR restrains him. They stand there watching—as all the others are watching.*)

SIBYL: You do not love me any more. (*Standing proudly erect*) Thank you for letting me know—in time. I might have gone on deceiving myself till—— I think I must have known all the time. But your love was all I had—all that I wanted to take with me. You never came; but I would not let myself believe—my heart hurt me so. But now I know, I can be brave, like you. How it must have hurt you to tell me!

HORACE: What could I do, Sibyl? What could I do but go on?

SIBYL: There is someone else?

HORACE: There is someone else.

SIBYL: But how? When?

HORACE: Over a month ago.

SIBYL: A whole month! And so all these three weeks it has been only make-believe? And your letters! I never got your letters.

HORACE: I never wrote. I couldn't—when I knew.

SIBYL: You might have written.

HORACE: I did not guess you cared so much.

SIBYL: Oh, Horace! And yet you pretended; you let me go on living in my dreams!

HORACE: Mr. Jones made me. He made me promise not to undeceive you to-night; but I had to.

SIBYL (*angrily*): He thought me a child. As if I couldn't have borne the truth. See how bravely I am bearing it now.

HORACE: He thought only of your happiness.

SIBYL: Yes, yes. I see it now. After all, my dreams were best. I see. He loved me. (*With a bitter laugh*) I see now he was the only one who loved me. But you? You love that other girl, you really love her? You're not deceiving her, too?

(*GALAHAD has moved across to the bottom of the steps.*)

HORACE: I love her. I am going to marry her.

KATHIE: Ah!

SIBYL (*With a wail she sways. HORACE moves to support her. But she repulses him with an outstretched arm, and recovers herself by a supreme effort*): No, no. Not *you*—now! Not *you!*

(*She sways again, as if about to faint and looks round for help. GALAHAD rushes up the steps to her.*)

Ah, *you!* My knight! My true knight! Take me! My Sir Galahad!

GALAHAD (*taking her into his arms*): Poor child? There, there, there!

SIBYL (*looking up into his face, happily, proudly*): Ah! *You* love me, my Sir Galahad!

(*She faints in his arms, dying.*)

(*GALAHAD, supporting her, is aware of other figures. EM. and KATHIE have come up the steps. THE BUTCHER is waiting near. THE DOCTOR and BEACH are on the other side.*)

DOCTOR: Yes. It's over.

BEACH: No, no, doctor. She's only fainted.

DOCTOR: No. It's come. It was bound to come—anyhow.

(*He takes SIBYL'S body from GALAHAD, and with him lays it on the grass, examines her, and rises.*)

It was her only chance, and it failed. You are not to blame, Mr. Beach. Nobody is to blame. Life has been drained out of her body long ago. It was wonderful that she was spared so long. I can do nothing further. I'll send the servants down from the house.

(*He goes away.*)

(*THE BUTCHER follows him up the path.*)

BEACH (*on his knees over Sibyl's body*): Sibyl! Sibyl! My pretty, pretty child!

EM. (*to GALAHAD, putting her hand in his*): I see now—not all; but—I see. I mistrusted you, Gally. It was for her, poor thing, and because she was in love. I see now. Forgive me, dear.

GALAHAD: That's all right, Em. If only I had told you at the first.

KATHIE: Forgive me, Horace. I doubted you. She—she is very beautiful.

HORACE (*aghast*): Kathie! I murdered her!

GALAHAD: No, no, boy. Take Kathie away.

KATHIE: Come, Horace.

(*She leads him away.*)

BEACH (*looking up*): Mr. Jones, I owe you all the little happiness she has had. Oh, child, child. Little Sibby. How often have I come to the nursery and seen you asleep like this!

(*Rises, blankly.*)

I prayed for a miracle. They said Love was a miracle. (*Harshly*) There are no miracles!

EM. (*softly, to GALAHAD*): Yes. A miracle has come to me.

GALAHAD: Em! Come away. We must go back into the world. Her lessons are over. We have yet to learn our lessons. Into this pitiful world sometimes there comes a miracle—the miracle called Love. We have learnt what Love is, dear.

(*They go out, up the path, hand in hand, leaving BEACH kneeling beside the body of SIBYL.*)

(*CURTAIN.*)

(*END OF THE COMEDY.*)

NOTE.—Should the theatrical manager demand his pound of flesh, the author has written, much against his will, an alternative "happy ending," in which Sibyl recovers. But he declines to print it here.

—A.H.A.

Mrs. PRETTY AND THE PREMIER

Mrs. Pretty and the Premier

A Political Comedy in Three Acts.

THE PERSONS IN THE COMEDY.

HERBERT DIX	The Premier's Chief Private Secretary
EFFIE BIMM	Stenographer in the Premier's Room
GREGORY	Chief Messenger at Parliament House
WILLIAM POWER	Premier
ERNEST BRISTED	The Premier's Second Private Secretary
PATRICK O'REILLY	A Constituent
EDWARD VYCE	The Party Whip
MARTHA CALLENDER	The Premier's Sister
CHARLES LUKIN	Reporter on "The Tribune"
HELEN PRETTY	A widow, the owner of Wyonora Estate
MRS. CUSACK	A friend of Mrs. Pretty's
VERNON HARRINGTON	Leader of the Opposition.

The action takes place in the Premier's room at Parliament House (Acts One and Three), and in the living room of Wyonora Homestead, Mrs. Pretty's estate (Act Two). The period is the present, the action being comprised within a few days.

ACT ONE.

SCENE: *If you wished to see WILLIAM POWER, the Premier of a certain Australian State, you would first have to wait in the lobby of Parliament House while GREGORY, the chief messenger, took in your card. If the Premier is disengaged—which isn't at all likely: you will probably have to wait your turn—you would be shown into the Premier's private office. There, behind a big table, covered with documents, you would find WILLIAM POWER awaiting you. While he finished scrawling his big signature over official documents you would have time to notice the room. It is a big, comfortably furnished room, lit by big windows at the back, and with a private entrance for the Premier. On the table you would notice a huge vase of flowers, a desk telephone, etc. Chairs here and there. Portraits of bygone premiers haughtily stare from the walls at this representative of Labor who has succeeded them. A small table and chair are set down in the corner for a stenographer, so placed that the reporter's back is right in the corner. Behind the big table is a large screen, concealing from sight a comfortable arm chair beneath the windows at the back. The purpose of this arrangement, it may be confessed, is to allow the Premier the chance of a nap in the intervals of his strenuous work, while his decorous secretary can let the importunate caller see for himself that the room is empty. Prominent above the door is the division-bell, used to summon members to the Chamber when a division is to be taken.*

The rest of the furniture includes:—A table for the Premier's chief private secretary—he has seven—and a tiny table and chair for a stenographer, with the usual office furnishings, including a desk telephone on the secretary's table. The door by which you entered from the lobby is in the back wall. There is also a smaller door.

It is the morning of a fine day.

HERBERT DIX, the Premier's chief private secretary, is seated at his table, working with calm fury, methodically clearing up the heaps of papers ready for the Premier's perusal and signature. He is a capable youngish man, emotionless, blasé to politics, suave, brisk and resourceful. And to be private secretary to such a tornado of energy as WILLIAM POWER, he needs to be all that.

His desk telephone rings.

DIX: Yes. Premier's room. . . . Who? . . . Reporter, yes. Which paper? . . . The "Tribune"! What's the "Tribune" want with the Premier? . . . Oh, it's you, Lukin! . . . Must see the Premier this morning, eh? Impossible . . . No; he's not down yet. Expect him any minute. But he won't see you. Told me only yesterday, and rather forcibly, that after the way your paper distorted his speech, he wouldn't see anybody from the "Tribune" till they apologised. So, you see, there's no chance. Sorry. . . . What's that? . . . He'll be only too anxious to see you when he knows what you've got hold of? . . . Concerns him personally, you say? Can't help that. If the thing's so urgent why didn't you ring him up at his private address? . . . Couldn't get him? . . . He hadn't been home all night! . . . Oh, he told me where he was going. If *that's* all your story! Well, I'll tell him you're here when he arrives. Better come down right away. Right.

(*He replaces 'phone. To himself, seriously.*)

The Premier wasn't home all night! Never known him to do that before. Curious——

(*He dives into his work again.*)

EFFIE BIMM, a meek little girl of the worshipping type, enters quietly through the small door. She is wearing the conventional blouse

and skirt, but has given way to her feminine love of adornment by crowning herself with a particularly virulent scarlet hat.

EFFIE (*stands a moment, self-curious, looking at DIX, confidently expecting from him some admiring comment*): Good-morning, Mr. Dix.

DIX: Morning, Miss Bimm. You're late, as usual.
(*He is too busy to look up.*)

EFFIE (*disappointed, sighs, and reverently removes the hat and rapturously admires it. Crossing to the small door, she calmly removes DIX'S hat from its peg, and places her hat there. DIX'S hat she relegates to a lower hook. Then she returns to her small table, sits, opens her typewriter, and starts typing letters without enthusiasm.*)

DIX: Miss Bimm, did you hear Bill say anything yesterday about not going home last night?

EFFIE: Goodness, no, Mr. Dix. Didn't he go home last night?

DIX: I heard not.

EFFIE: Then where did he sleep?

DIX: Oh, the Premier doesn't sleep. Hasn't the time to waste.

EFFIE: It couldn't have been a woman?

DIX: A woman? You women are always looking for the woman—that is, when you're not looking for the man. The Premier interested in a woman! You know what Bill thinks of females!

EFFIE: Haven't I cause? He doesn't even see them. I bet he's never seen *me!*

DIX: Sees you every hour of the day. Can't help it. No more can I.

EFFIE (*rising tragically*): No. He looks through me. He doesn't know I exist except as a kind of pianola attachment to a typewriter.

DIX: Well, that's what you are. You're not paid a screw for being a woman, are you?

EFFIE: No; but you'd think that any man, even if he is a Premier, would become conscious—in time—of the presence of a woman if she was always about. And he's never even noticed what I've got on or how I do my hair. Since I came here I've done it nine different ways, too. You'd think that any man——

DIX: Bill isn't a man. He's merely a Premier—a sort of political dynamo running the country at top speed. And he's always been like that. He's worked too hard all his life to spare the time to get married.

EFFIE: I often wonder why he never did. I like to think that he had some disappointment when he was young; some sacred memory to which his heart is for ever faithful—some faded little portrait that he wears next his heart!

DIX (*with a shriek of delight at the picture*): Bill!

EFFIE: Ah, you're only a man. It takes a woman's intuition to know that some day——

DIX: Some day, you think, he'll switch that whirring dynamo of his on to love-making, and then there'll be an earthquake? My dear Miss Bimm, you're a capable typewriter, but your mind is soggy with sentiment. Politics aren't romantic.

EFFIE: No; that's the greatest disappointment of my life. But some day—that's why I got that new hat.

DIX: Good Lord, is that a hat?

EFFIE: Striking, don't you think?

DIX: Blinding! You mean to say you got that for Bill?

EFFIE: Yes.

DIX: If he catches sight of that conflagration—well, you know Bill's capacity for language, but you've never heard him in full blast with the

valve blown off! While there's time, you'd better take it up with a tongs and bury it in the backyard.

EFFIE: You think he'll really notice it?

DIX: If he's not color-blind.

EFFIE: Of course, I'd like him to see it on. You can never judge a hat off. I'll show you.

DIX: Don't waste it on me. I've just had breakfast. Let me see that letter to the Education Department.

EFFIE (*returns to her desk and searches*): Oh, I left it on the other desk.

(*She crosses to the small table.*)

(*Returning with the letter, she notices the vase of flowers on the Premier's table, goes up and re-arranges them, and lightly kisses the flowers. Then she sees on the floor a little gold-mesh handbag. She picks it up.*)

Oh!

DIX (*without looking up*): Hurry.

EFFIE: Look what I found!

DIX (*rising*): What's that?

EFFIE: Stupid! A lady's handbag. Expensive-looking, too.

DIX: Where did you get it?

EFFIE: On the floor.

DIX: A lady's handbag in the Premier's room! And Bill never went home last night!

EFFIE: Oh, it *was* a woman!

DIX: Nonsense. Somebody left it yesterday.

EFFIE: But the cleaners always do out the room after the Premier goes.

DIX: That's so.

EFFIE: She left it last night. The abandoned creature! And I did think Mr. Power——

DIX: There's sure to be some simple explanation.

EFFIE: Well, we'll soon find out.

(*She begins to open the bag. He snatches it.*)

DIX: Here? You're not going to open it?

EFFIE: I only want to find out the creature's name and address—to send it back.

DIX: No, you don't. This isn't our affair. Put it back exactly where you found it, quick. He'll be in any minute now.

(*EFFIE unwillingly puts it back on the floor.*)

And get on with your work.

EFFIE (*returning to her desk, and stabbing rapidly and viciously at the typewriter keys*): So—it—was—a—woman! Oh! A—rich—woman—too!

GREGORY enters.

(*He is an old man, who having been in the privileged position of chief messenger for many years, long before the present Premier took office, looks on Premiers with a kind of paternal interest. As he is always called Gregory his other name does not matter—nor is there probably any other person who knows it.*)

GREGORY (*coming to DIX with a handful of visiting cards and forms filled in by persons stating their business with the Premier, waiting in the lobby*): Morning, sir.

DIX: Hullo, Gregory. The usual crowd waiting in the lobby?

GREGORY: Two deputations, and a mob of out-of-works.

DIX: Lukin, the chap from the "Tribune."

(*Reading the card.*)

"Personal—of the utmost urgency." I wonder if he knows anything about that——? Any ladies, Gregory?

GREGORY: Ladies, Mr. Dix? No, thank God. I always hates to see ladies calling on Premeers. But Bill hates 'em, too. (*Suddenly recollecting*) By the way, there was a lady here late yesterday afternoon. I told her Bill wouldn't be in if he didn't turn up before six. She said she'd wait. I left her in the lobby.

DIX: Give her name?

GREGORY: No.

DIX: As Bill didn't turn up I suppose she got tired and went.

GREGORY: Must have. She wasn't there when I came back from my tea. You'd all gone by then, sir.

DIX: Any special callers out there now?

GREGORY: None that I couldn't dispose of myself, sir.

DIX: Of course, you could run the country yourself, couldn't you?

GREGORY: No. But I've been here so long as Premeer's messenger, that I know more about that crowd than any Premeer would. I recollect all their faces. I could tell you what every blessed son of a gun wants.

DIX: What every blessed son of a gun wants is a Government job.

GREGORY: Exactly, sir. I've been here almost since there were Premeers. I've seen five come and go. And I'll see lots more come and go. If Bill 'ud only let me take his interviewing off his shoulders he might stay a little longer than the others.

DIX: You won't see Bill go, unless he explodes from too much energy. He's a sticker.

GREGORY: So they all thought they were, sir.

(*GREGORY goes out.*)

DIX: That newspaper chap with his urgent personal interview—and that woman waiting yesterday—and that handbag—— I don't quite like the look of it.

EFFIE: Here he comes!

(*She types furiously.*)

(*A voice, a loud, domineering voice, is heard outside the Premier's private door. The door is flung open.*)

WILLIAM POWER, the Labor Premier, enters.

(*He is a big man of middle age, with rough, strong features. He recognises that he is the autocrat of the State, has a fierce belief in himself, and looks the typical successful politician. Withal he is a likeable man, with a large heart and a boisterous manner and a sense of kindly humor. He is well versed in all the tricks of his trade, ready to win by cunning where straight dealing will not do. He is a man of the people, dressed now, without ostentation, in a morning suit, well cut. He radiates the instant impression of immense will power and physical force. As he enters he is in the middle of dictating a telegram to his second private secretary, ERNEST BRISTED, a colorless young man, who enters behind him, making rapid shorthand notes in his notebook.*)

POWER (*dictating, as he pauses at the door, to BRISTED, as yet unseen*): Must have information by return. Got that?

BRISTED appears.

Wire Postmaster-General——

(*DIX brings a bundle of documents, which he places on the table.*)

DIX: Good-morning, sir.

POWER: Morning, Dix.

(*Hands him his tall hat, which DIX hangs up.*)

Postmaster-General. (*Dictating to BRISTED*) Find places for two telephone girls at Burraboo exchange. Immediate. Write Postmaster-General, giving names. Dix knows all about it. Telephone Vyce, see me at once. Send messenger to my house to fetch two clean handkerchiefs. Order special train for midnight for Mowlong. Reprimand porter for not supplying hot foot-warmers last trip. Bring the matter under the notice of the Chief Commissioner, and tell him from me that if his rotten railways can't provide hot foot-warmers for the Premier, I'll get a question asked about it in the House. You come with me, Bristed, in the special. And two other secretaries. Dix stays here. Prepare a speech for the opening of the new public library at Mowlong—some rot about culture and the working man. Culture! I never found any need of it. Telegraph that fool Brown, that if he thinks he's going to win Wyonora bye-election for us he had better get a move on. There's a complaint from Dead Cow Corner that he's never spoken there. And there are thirteen good Government votes waiting for him there. I'm sending up three members of the Cabinet to help. Tell him not to be too damned definite in his speeches. It's easily seen he's never been in Parliament before. He's committing the Government too much. Keep to generalities—generalities never did anybody much harm. That's all just now.

BRISTED disappears.

(*By this time POWER is seated at the table. He glances rapidly at the letters placed before him by DIX, pencils brief memos. on them, and scrawls his big signature over other documents.*)

POWER (*to DIX, who stands waiting*): Any deputations waiting?

DIX: Two. Duplication of railways and totalizator bill.

POWER: They'll keep. Send in the others.

DIX: Yes, sir.

POWER: Where's that draft of the Compulsory Resumption of Estates Bill?

DIX (*indicating it on the table*): Here, sir.

POWER: This'll give the big squatters hell, eh?

DIX: They've been looking for it for a long while, sir.

(*He rings the bell and signals EFFIE.*)

EFFIE (*rises wtih notebook and crosses*): Good-morning, sir.

POWER (*busy scanning the Bill, not looking up*): Morning.

(*EFFIE sits at the small table, her back to the corner, ready to take shorthand notes of the interviews.*)

GREGORY shows in PATRICK O'REILLY, an ancient man, cringing and persuasive.

GREGORY: Thank yer stars, Patrick O'Reilly, that you've got the sort of face that you only see in the zoo. If I didn't remember you, you'd be waiting outside in the lobby all the morning. And what do you want with the Premeer?

PATRICK: Shure, what we all of us do be wanting—a job.

GREGORY: But you got a job from the last Premeer. Didn't he make yer a night-watchman?

PATRICK: Oi lost that job. Oi couldn't kape awake after supper, could I?

GREGORY: I told Sir Charles about yer, but he said you was a tenant on his estate in England, and he never forgot old friends.

PATRICK: Now, did Oi tell him thot? Oi've got the worst mimery a mahn was iver blessed wid. Oi niver was in England. I knew Bill Power in the days of the gold-rush when he used to kape a store. 'Im and me was great freends—leastwise Oi was.

GREGORY: This Premeer always remembers old friends, too.

PATRICK: But maybe he won't remember me. You just hop in and tell him I knew him in the good old days.

GREGORY: You're the third man in this week who knoo Bill Power when he kep' a store on the diggings. Come on.

(*He ushers PATRICK in.*)

(*To POWER*): Mr. Patrick O'Reilly, sir, who knew you in the gold-digging days.

POWER (*genially grasping PATRICK'S hand*): Always glad to meet an old friend. I remember you perfectly, Pat.

PATRICK: I was a customer when you kept that store, sorr. Don't you remimber I owed you sivin shillings?

POWER: Do you?

(*Holds out his hand for it.*)

(*GREGORY retires.*)

PATRICK: Oi haven't me cheque-book handy, sorr.

POWER: Well, what can I do for you, Pat.?

PATRICK: Just a little bit of a job, sorr.

POWER: Certainly. What sort of a job do you want?

PATRICK: Anny job, sorr, where I don't have to keep awake.

POWER: A clerkship in one of the Government departments? Dix!

(*DIX brings an open letter in his hand.*)

POWER: Any vacancies for temporary clerkships in the Treasury?

DIX: Overstaffed, sir.

POWER: Tell the Under-secretary to make one for my friend, Mr. Patrick O'Reilly.

DIX: Yes, sir.

POWER: And instruct the Under-secretary to deduct seven shillings —no, seven shillings and sixpence—interest—from his first month's salary and pay it to my private account.

DIX: Yes, sir. By the way, there's a note from the Under-secretary about that man you sent to him yesterday. Here it is.

POWER: What does the blighter say?

DIX: Says he can't give your appointee a position as a clerk, despite your personal recommendation.

POWER: But, dammit, I told him to! Why?

DIX (*reading*): Because your man can't read or write.

POWER (*snatches the letter, doubles up one corner, scribbles on it and hands it back*): Can't read or write, eh? There!

DIX (*reading*): "Teach him! William Power." That ought to get over the trifling difficulty, sir.

PATRICK: Would ye mind, sorr, just putting thim little words on me own appointment paper?

POWER: Of course. (*To DIX*) Fix my friend O'Reilly up.

PATRICK: Thank ye, sorr. Glory be, you're the sort of primmier that we'll have soon in Oireland!

(*They shake hands and DIX shows PATRICK out.*)

(*POWER turns again to scrutinise the draft of the Bill.*)

GREGORY enters with a card, which he shows to DIX.

DIX (*back at his desk*): The Premier never sees women.

GREGORY: She said he was sure to see her.

DIX: Well, try him.

(*GREGORY comes to POWER.*)

GREGORY: Sir, there's a lady——

POWER: I never see ladies.

GREGORY: That's what I told her, sir. But she said that when you saw her card you'd see her.

POWER (*suddenly interested*): Perhaps it's——?

(*He snatches the card and reads.*)

Mrs. Arthur Pretty. No. Not her. But I know the name. What's her business?

GREGORY: She's the owner of Wyonora Estate, sir.

POWER: Ah! The owner of Wyonora, the biggest run in the State, the first one we're going to compulsorily resume! So she's come to me, to make a personal appeal to leave her her estate. She believes I'm the sort of fool to capitulate to a fascinating face? I suppose she *is* fascinating, Gregory?

GREGORY: As dangerous, I should say, sir, as a death-adder.

POWER: I won't see her.

GREGORY: Thank you, sir.

POWER: Thank you? I'm doing it in self-defence.

GREGORY: That's why, sir. There's one sort of face that I don't like to see among the crowd out there in the lobby, and that's a woman's.

POWER: What woman?

GREGORY: Any woman, sir. They're all death-adders.

POWER: Oh, I don't worry about women—no time.

GREGORY: No, sir; but it's when they begin to worry about *you*. And especially when they're widows.

POWER: How do you know she's a widow?

GREGORY: Instinct, sir. The blind instinct that frightens a bird when it sees a snake.

POWER: Mrs. Arthur Pretty *is* a widow.

GREGORY: There, I knew it, sir. Instinct. You remember Mr. Beattie, sir? He was Premeer ten years ago. He lost his job through a widow. And there was Mr. Perkins. He looked good for a lifetime in that there chair. And when I saw a pretty woman patiently waiting in the lobby to see him on private business, and my instinct warned me she was a widow, I knew. He lost his job three weeks later.

POWER: Then my fate is in your hands, Gregory. Don't let 'em in, except over your dead body.

GREGORY: You can't keep 'em out, sir, when they've got on a new hat.

POWER: Has Mrs. Pretty got on a new hat?

GREGORY: It looks guilty, sir.

POWER: Then tell her to put herself and her new hat into writing. Dix knows how to deal with letters.

GREGORY: Thank you, sir. But you can't always keep 'em out—not this sort. (*To DIX*) No; he won't see her. But she'll see him.

DIX: Nonsense!

GREGORY: She's the persistent variety.

DIX: How do you know?

GREGORY: She was the lady who was waiting here all yesterday afternoon.

DIX (*sharply, interested*): Has she a handbag?

GREGORY: I didn't notice one to-day, but she had a gold thing yesterday.

DIX: What's her name? Oh! Mrs. Arthur Pretty! Oh, it's only business. She wants Bill to save her estate from being resumed.

GREGORY: He told me to tell her to put her request in writing. But she won't.

GREGORY goes out.

EDWARD VYCE enters through the private door.

(*He is the party whip, an old and experienced politician.*)

(*EFFIE gets up, as soon as she sees him, and crosses to her desk, where she starts typing.*)

POWER: Waiting for you, Vyce.

VYCE: Came as soon as I got your 'phone, Bill.

POWER: What about the bye-election?

VYCE: I think we'll just about win.

POWER: Dammit, Vyce, we *must* win!

VYCE: Don't I know that? We can't carry on much longer with our small majority. But this Compulsory Resumption of Estates Bill of yours ought to be our trump card. Especially as it is in Wyonora electorate, and Wyonora estate is the biggest in the country, and the emptiest.

POWER: The emptiest! Yes. Look here. Compulsory Resumption of Estates Bill sounds rather—rather thin, eh? I've got it. Compulsory Resumption of *Empty* Estates Bill! How's that to catch the votes for us?

VYCE: The very thing! Bill, you're a genius. That'll be worth a hundred votes to us. And we'll badly need that hundred. Everybody knows that Wyonora Estate is only a sheep-run. And all the landless votes in that district! Every little Tory farmer wants a cut at that big rich cake. We'll rake 'em all in.

POWER: No. You put it badly.

(*He rises.*)

What the Government is thinking of is all that fine land locked up for a sheep-run. The railway runs right through it, and the country wants people, human souls, not silly sheep.

VYCE: That's so. People have votes, for us, and sheep haven't. Though, personally, I wouldn't mind if the sheep had. We could depend on their votes.

POWER: Think of all that rich country subdivided into little farms, with big, prosperous families singing a pæan of gratitude to us, where now there are only sheep tracks and boundary riders!

VYCE: You always were an optimist, Bill. But I see you've got your election speech prepared.

POWER (*working himself up*): And what title has the owner? What did *he* ever do to make Wyonora rich? What had *he* to do with the railway we've brought right up to his back door?

VYCE: Steady on, old man. It isn't a he; it's a she.

POWER: So it is. Mrs. Pretty. Why, I forgot to tell you. Mrs. Pretty is here now.

VYCE: Here?

POWER: Waiting in the lobby.

VYCE: Come to plead to you, to appeal to your chivalry and your better instincts?

POWER: Yes—in writing.

VYCE: She's a fascinating woman, they say.

POWER: That's why.

VYCE: Aren't you a little scared of women, Bill?

POWER: Scared to hell!

VYCE: Why?

POWER: You can't bluff a woman. Why, I can't bluff my own sister. She treats me like a kid. Calls me her little Willie.

(*He returns to his table and sits.*)

VYCE: Her little Willie! Bill, sometimes I'm afraid you'll fall in. It's always the scared ones who do.

POWER: No fear. Gregory keeps 'em out. He's scared, too.

VYCE: Those reports from Wyonora ought to be in now. I'll let you know if there's any new development.

(*He retires.*)

GREGORY shows in MARTHA CALLANDER.

(*MRS. CALLANDER, the Premier's sister, is a widow, fat, genial, shrewd and commonplace. Her brother's astonishing rise to power has not altered her one whit.*)

MARTHA (*at a loss, showing that she has never visited her brother's office before*): Where's Willy? I'm the Premier's sister.

GREGORY: Inside, Mrs. Callender.

(*He shows her in.*)

POWER: Hullo, Martha! What brings you here?

MARTHA: Well you know, Willy. Where were you last night?

POWER: I was working here late—too late to go home.

MARTHA: You can't deceive your elder sister, Willy. There's been disgraceful goings-on, there has. But you'll please remember that you can't sully the name of Power without your sister protesting. And a respectable name, thank goodness, it has always been. The Powers has always been sober folk and honest workmen. Your father was the best plumber in the whole colony, and if you did run away to the gold-diggings, instead of following his trade, and kept a store, you've lived that down since you went into politics. And to think that now you're old enough to know better, you stay out all night.

POWER: But I told you I was working so late that——

MARTHA: And you didn't tell me the truth, Willy. Oh, I know politicians don't, but this isn't politics. It's your sister. I waited up for you till one o'clock last night, and I had a nice hot supper waiting, on that new gas stove. My word, Willy, that was a great idea of yours, that gas stove. I was always fond of the kitchen range—many's the good dinner I've cooked on a range for poor Henry; but where he's gone now I don't suppose he'll need hot dinners. And, mind ye, I'm not saying that for cooking a joint the range isn't the best; but for keeping a supper hot all you have to do is to turn the gas low—though I doubt but that you'll find it expensive. And at last I had to turn the gas out. And I hardly slept a wink, thinking of my Willy spending the night in the glittering haunts of wickedness.

POWER: My dear Martha, I can look after myself.

MARTHA: And that's just what you can't do. You've got a good job now—a better job than poor Henry ever had—though if he did drink a bit, who am I to blame him? And they give you a fine big room to work in; and I've no doubt you can run the country all right—the Powers always were pretty good bluffers; but you need a woman to look after you. So this morning when that messenger in uniform came to fetch you a couple of clean handkerchiefs—my word, I was relieved to find that you weren't in gaol—many's the fright poor Henry used to give me!—I said to myself: Willy wants his sister to look after him. And I came straight here myself and sent the messenger packing. Here's your handkerchiefs (*opening her bag*) and—I knew it! You've got a dirty collar on (*Producing the handkerchiefs and the clean collar*). And you told me, when you got this job, that you'd have to have a clean collar every blessed day. Take it off.

(*He meekly does so, and allows her to put the clean one on.*)

And I needn't tell you how mighty inconvenient it is me coming here at all. I've left your lunch cooking on the gas stove; and I've been thinking ever since I left that I left the gas turned too high. But if

you have a burnt lunch you'll know it's your own fault. I'll just hurry back. Your hair hasn't been properly brushed. I knew it.

(*Producing his hair brushes from her bag and brushing his hair.*)

And there's a smear of dust on that there mantelpiece. And I bet they never look behind the pictures when they dust. Inches thick! And now, before I fly to that gas stove—it might explode or something—tell me, Willy, where you were last night?

POWER: I told you that I was working here late—so late that it must have been two o'clock before I even looked at the time; and as I didn't want to disturb you at that hour I went to an hotel to sleep.

MARTHA: What hotel?

POWER: The Commonwealth.

MARTHA: Oh, well, I must believe you, Willy. And I'm that glad that it wasn't the haunts of wickedness. But you missed a nice hot supper.

(*Turning to go, she sees on the floor the handbag. She picks it up.*)

Willy! What's this?

POWER (*startled*): Looks like a lady's handbag, doesn't it?

MARTHA: Whose?

POWER: I haven't the least idea.

MARTHA: But how did it come here?

POWER: Left by some visitor here before I came down this morning, I expect.

MARTHA: Willy, do you really expect me to believe that?

POWER: Wait a minute. I'll enquire. (*Calls*) Miss Bimm!

(*EFFIE rises.*)

POWER: Miss Bimm, do you know whose this is?

EFFIE (*hesitates, then seeing the Premier's gaze upon her, makes her effort*): Mine, sir.

MARTHA: Yours?

POWER: There, you see.

MARTHA: But I don't see.

EFFIE (*glibly*): I dropped it here before you came, sir.

(*Taking it from MARTHA.*)

Thank you.

POWER: Very careless of you, Miss Bimm. Please don't leave your things in my room again.

EFFIE: Oh, no, sir.

MARTHA: But it's such an expensive-looking bag. I didn't know that young women—— But there, I'm forgetting that gas stove. It'll be red hot and the nice hash burnt to cinders!

MARTHA rushes out.

POWER: Thank you, Miss Bimm.

EFFIE: Oh, sir, there's nothing to thank me for. I'd do more than that for—for the Premier. It is a pretty bag, isn't it? I wonder whose?

POWER: I wonder?

GREGORY returns.

POWER: Keep it till the owner claims it—and tell me when she calls.

(*EFFIE takes it and puts it in the drawer of her desk.*)

GREGORY: There's a reporter from the "Tribune," sir.

POWER: Haven't I told you I won't see the "Tribune"?

GREGORY: That's what I have told him, sir; but he sent in a note, personal.

POWER (*taking the note from GREGORY, opens it and reads. He is evidently astonished and concerned by its contents. After a pause, rapidly thinking*): Bring him in.

GREGORY opens the door and shows in CHARLES LUKIN, a keen-faced young journalist.

LUKIN: Good-morning, sir!

POWER: Oh, it's you, Lukin. I always said you were too smart a journalist to be on that Tory rag.

LUKIN: Thank you, sir. I came to see you first thing. The article is ready for publication in to-morrow's issue. You will see that it will make an immense impression. But it occurred to the editor that possibly you might have an explanation. It seemed only the fair thing to inform you.

POWER (*as EFFIE, who has risen, and is about to take her seat to report the interview*): No need, Miss Bimm. This is private.

(*EFFIE goes back to her desk.*)

POWER: State your business, Lukin.

LUKIN: Last night, or rather, this morning, I happened to be passing the House shortly after two o'clock. Two-seventeen, to be exact. I looked at my watch. As I was approaching the door that leads to this room from the street, by that door (*indicating the private door*), I saw you coming out with a lady, veiled.

POWER: Go on.

LUKIN: There was a cab coming along the street—the only one in sight, worse luck! You hailed it, put the lady in and got in yourself. The cab drove off.

POWER: Well?

LUKIN: That's all. I followed it on foot, but it got away.

POWER: Well?

LUKIN: What I'd seen is enough—for the "Tribune's" purposes. But the whole staff is on to this story, and we'll have the missing details—the continuation of the story—for to-morrow's issue.

POWER: You mean to publish this story? What harm will that do me?

LUKIN: Surely you can see? The Premier, an unmarried man, is seen leaving the House, on a night when Parliament wasn't sitting, with a veiled woman in the early hours of the morning. Where was she before? In this room, with you.

POWER: She was.

LUKIN: You confess it?

POWER: Certainly. And you think it worth while to publish this trifling incident?

LUKIN: Do you think the "Tribune" could afford to miss a chance like this? When the paper comes out to-morrow—the Premier involved in a scandal with a mysterious lady—Oh, you'll get plenty of head-lines!—what chance will you have of winning the bye-election? What chance, even, of retaining your own position?

POWER: I see. You'll make use of it.

LUKIN: We must.

POWER: A pretty scheme, but you've overlooked something. Surely you know that the publication of that story, even if true, is libel.

LUKIN: Of course it's libel.

POWER: Well?

LUKIN: Do you think the "Tribune" would stick at a libel action to smash up your party?

POWER: Do you mean to tell me that your paper will deliberately

lay itself open to enormous damages in the libel action I am bound to bring?

LUKIN: Yes. £5,000 would be cheap to us if it ruined you. The Liberal party would willingly put up £10,000. They can afford it. And we'll appeal—right up to the Privy Council. It'll cost you all that to get a verdict. Oh, we'll risk the libel action, and you won't survive it.

POWER: I see. But why do you come to me? Why do you take the trouble to give away your dirty little scheme? Blackmail?

LUKIN: No. The editor thought that you might have some loophole of escape. My story looks damning enough, doesn't it? But, for all we know, there might be some easy explanation. We don't mind the libel action, but we don't want to look ridiculous.

POWER: And you won't print the article if I give you my explanation?

LUKIN: It will depend on the explanation. In any case we'll promise to print the explanation with the article. But, if I may suggest, sir, it will have to be a thumping good explanation.

POWER (*rises and comes in front of the table*): Sir! (*Restraining himself*) But of course you've only got your facts to go on. I admit they look queer. But when you hear what happened—well, the "Tribune," to-morrow, will be as dull as it invariably is. The facts are these: I came here last night—yes, it would be about ten o'clock.

LUKIN: I've found out since that your room was lighted up from ten till twelve minutes past two.

POWER: I had to finish up a mass of work. I got interested, and worked solidly on till I had finished. Then I was astonished to find that it was after two in the morning. I've done that before. I put my papers in order, turned out the light, and was groping my way to that door when I clumsily knocked over this screen (*indicating the big screen behind him*). At the same moment, I heard a woman's scream. I pushed aside the screen (*he does so, revealing a comfortable arm chair behind it, under the window at back*), and in that arm chair I dimly made out the figure of a woman.

LUKIN: And how did she happen to be there?

POWER: That's what I asked her, as soon as she realised where she was. She had been asleep.

LUKIN: She slept here, then?

POWER: Yes; she was sleeping here all the time I was sitting working at this table. I hadn't the least idea.

LUKIN: Was she doing it for a wager, or what?

POWER: She told me that she had spent the previous night travelling in the train, and hadn't got a wink of sleep. All yesterday she had been rushing about, shopping; and in the afternoon she came to see me on business here.

LUKIN: On business? By appointment, I suppose?

POWER: No. I don't make business appointments with ladies. I wasn't able to get down to my office all the afternoon. As you know, I had two confounded functions to attend. That was why I came back at night to work off arrears. And she waited and waited on the chance of seeing me, and at last, worn out by her lack of sleep, she had quietly dropped off in that big chair.

LUKIN: But callers on the Premier aren't usually allowed to fall asleep on his private arm chair. How did she get in here?

POWER: Naturally I asked her that, as I was taking her downstairs. She said she had waited in the lobby till late, and then seeing the door of the ante-room open—Dix usually locks it when he's leaving. I must reprimand him—So, as there was nobody about then—Gregory must have forgotten all about her—she came into the ante-room. She confessed that she didn't find the chairs for callers there very comfortable;

and she was dreadfully tired, so, without any thought that this was my private room, she wandered in here, found that big chair behind the screen and sat down to wait for me. And, after a while, she simply dropped off to sleep. And she made up for her lost night by sleeping solidly till I knocked over the screen. And I believe that if I hadn't done that, she'd have slept till daylight.

LUKIN: That's what she told you?

POWER: Yes.

LUKIN: And you believed her?

POWER: Naturally.

LUKIN: But you don't expect me to believe her?

POWER: Why shouldn't you? I certainly found here there, and she couldn't have come in while I was in the room, could she?

LUKIN: And what did she come to see you for?

POWER: I didn't ask her. I wasn't going to talk business at that hour.

LUKIN: And then?

POWER: She couldn't stay here. I took her down, got a cab, and——

LUKIN: Accompanied her.

POWER: She insisted on giving me a lift. There was no other cab in sight.

LUKIN: And then?

POWER: I offered to see her to her address; but she wouldn't allow me to trouble. Said she had a latch-key. So when I was passing the Commonwealth Hotel, I decided to stay there for the night. I got out and left her in the cab.

LUKIN: You see how necessary it is for us to have all the facts for confirmation. I may believe you, but it will be hard to convince our readers.

POWER: I can trust the "Tribune" to make it impossible.

LUKIN: If you could give me the lady's address we could have her corroboration.

POWER: I don't remember—somewhere in Pott's Point, I think. She told me she was staying with friends.

LUKIN: I see. You want to shield her.

POWER: I have told you the simple truth—the whole truth.

LUKIN: But do you seriously think, sir, that the public will accept your explanation?

POWER: Why not? It's true.

LUKIN: I shall be delighted to give your explanation in full to our readers. I really think it's more interesting than my story. And you can see what effect your story will have on the bye-election, and on your own position. The "Tribune" will force you to resign.

POWER: I see.

(He pauses, turning away, reviewing the situation, then suddenly laughs.)

Look here, Lukin; I admit I tried to bluff you.

LUKIN: I knew it. But what I couldn't make out was why you thought your—er—explanation would go down with me.

POWER: I merely tried it on you to save the lady's name.

LUKIN: That wouldn't have done you much good. We'll have the lady's name before we go to press to-night.

POWER: I shall save you the trouble.

LUKIN: You'll give me her name?

POWER: Yes—in confidence.

LUKIN: I warn you, sir, that I won't be bound by your confidence if I find her name by other means.

POWER: I'll take that risk. Her name is—Mrs. William Power.

LUKIN: Your wife? But you're not married?

POWER: You mean that nobody knew I was married.

LUKIN: The veiled lady was your wife.

POWER: *Is* my wife.

LUKIN: But what proof have I that this isn't another—er—explanation?

POWER (*cheerfully*): No proof at all. But publish your story—and I'll sue you for damages, make the "Tribune" a laughing stock and produce my wife.

LUKIN: I see. But when were you married? And what was her maiden name?

POWER: Look here, Lukin. I tried to bluff you, simply because my marriage is a secret one and I intend to keep it secret. We were married a few days ago; my wife came to see me secretly last night—not the first time, either. That's all. You can't use the fact that I'm married: it was told you in confidence; and you won't be able to discover the identity of my wife. But publish your silly story—and my wife will give evidence in the libel action.

LUKIN: You've got me. The "Tribune" wouldn't take the risk. If she is your wife my story is a mare's nest. But I'll hold it—and if you don't produce your wife—not necessarily in public, but to a representative of the "Tribune"—we'll go ahead and risk proceedings.

POWER: I shall introduce you to her.

LUKIN: You will? When?

POWER: In three days.

LUKIN: Three days. But by that time the bye-election will have been decided.

POWER: So it will be.

LUKIN: It looks like a trick to prevent any disclosure before the election. But that doesn't matter. Even if we lose the election, we've got a bigger card up our sleeves. If there is no wife after all, we've still got *you*. The publication of my story, with as many explanations as you like to supply, will finish you and break up your party.

POWER: You are at liberty to try—if within three days I do not introduce you to the charming lady whom I've just had the luck to marry.

LUKIN: Perhaps I shall find her first—at least the lady who visited you last night and stayed so late.

POWER: Exactly. Mrs. William Power.

LUKIN: Exactly. Good-morning—and, if I may, sir, my congratulations.

POWER: Thanks.

LUKIN goes out.

POWER (*breathes a sigh of relief. The desk telephone rings*): Yes, Power speaking. That you, Vyce? Yes . . . Got those reports re Wyonora? No; don't come up. I'll come to you straightaway.

(*Rings off.*)

(*To DIX*) I'm going to Vyce's room. Back in ten minutes.

DIX: Yes, sir.

POWER goes out through his private door.

GREGORY appears, supporting a lady in his arms. She presents the appearance of having just fainted.

GREGORY: It's all right, madam. More air in here. I'll get you a seat.

DIX: What's up, Gregory?

GREGORY: Lady fainted in the crowded lobby.

DIX: Quick, put her here! Quite right, Gregory.

(*With EFFIE'S assistance they place the LADY in DIX'S chair. She lies limp.*)

Here!

(*DIX gets a glass of water and holds it to the LADY'S lips.*)

EFFIE: Look! She's drinking it!

DIX: She'll be all right. The heat and the crowd, I expect. Who is she?

GREGORY: The lady who sent in her card, and the Premeer wouldn't see her.

DIX: Mrs. Pretty, the owner of Wyonora Estate. Hm! Charming, and a widow. No wonder Bill fled.

GREGORY: She's the woman who was waiting to see him all yesterday afternoon. I told the Premeer you can't keep widows out.

EFFIE: She *is* beautiful. And look at that hat! And look at mine!

DIX: Hush! She's coming to.

(*HELEN PRETTY revives and sits up. She is all that has been said about her fascination and charm. A smartly dressed woman of twenty-five, obviously accustomed to getting her own delightful way. Usually a smile is sufficient.*)

HELEN: What? Did I faint? How stupid of me! Where am I?

DIX: In the Premier's room, madam. You fainted in the crowded lobby, and Gregory luckily carried you straight in here. There's more air here.

HELEN: Oh, thank you, thank you all. (*Brightly, casting off the pretence that had so easily secured her entrance to forbidden ground*) And now, can I see the Premier?

DIX: You fainted on purpose? You were merely pretending?

HELEN: The Premier wouldn't see me. What else could I do?

GREGORY: Widows! I knew it was no use!

DIX: But I assure you that the Premier won't see you now.

HELEN: After all the trouble you nice people have taken to bring me here! After I've got so far!

DIX: Mrs. Pretty, I'm sorry; but the Premier's orders——

HELEN: He's a man, isn't he? I can deal with men.

(*Rises, and before the others can guess her intention, comes to the Premier's table. She stops, dismayed at seeing he is not present.*)

Why, where is he?

DIX: Gone out, Mrs. Pretty. I told you he wouldn't——

HELEN: Fled? No; he's hiding.

DIX: Hiding?

HELEN: Behind that big screen. That's what it's for. Please, Mr. Premier, come out. Puss! Puss!

(*Pause.—She goes quickly up and peers behind the screen.*)

Oh, not there!

(*Disappointed, she comes back.*)

But he *was* here?

DIX: I told you he had gone.

HELEN: I'll wait.

(*Moving up to the arm chair.*)

This seems a most comfortable chair!

GREGORY: The Premeer has gone for the day, madam.

HELEN: Then I'll just sit down for a few minutes. I'm feeling faint again.

DIX: If you'll kindly wait outside——

HELEN: But this chair. It's just the sort of chair I could go to sleep in! These Labor Premiers do do themselves well, don't they ?

DIX: Mrs. Pretty, if you'll kindly wait in that room (*indicating the small door on which EFFIE'S hat is hanging*), I'll promise you that I'll call you the moment the Premier returns.

HELEN: Then he is going to return? That's all I wanted to know. Thank you so much.

DIX (*opening the small door*): If you please, madam.

HELEN: In here? Oh, what a striking hat! Yours? Suits you admirably, I should say.

GREGORY: The paper, madam?

(*Voices are heard outside the Premier's private door.*)

HELEN: There he is!

DIX (*interposing*): He's got someone with him. It's Vyce, the party whip.

HELEN: Shoo him off. I must see the Premier alone.

DIX: I'm sorry, Mrs. Pretty, but you'll have to wait.

HELEN: But you've promised?

DIX: The minute that Mr. Vyce goes I shall tell Mr. Power.

HELEN: Oh, well!

(*Glancing at the paper.*)

Why, it must be winter! Here's David's big winter sale advertised.

(*She goes through the door, which DIX carefully closes behind her.*)

GREGORY: Lock it, and fling the key through the window. It's our only chance!

DIX: Nonsense, Gregory. I promised. Besides, there isn't a key.

GREGORY: Oh, well. I washes my hands of you all.

He goes out.

POWER and VYCE re-enter.

VYCE: Go on. You were working here till after two. And then you knocked over the screen——

POWER: And found the woman asleep in the chair.

VYCE: Some chaps have all the luck! But, honest, now, speaking as a man and not as a politician, hadn't you any suspicion that she was there?

POWER: How could I? So I took her down to the street, got a cab and sent her home.

VYCE: And the "Tribune" reporter caught you. Bill, a man in your position should have been more careful.

POWER: Careful?

VYCE: Not to be found out.

POWER: But there was nothing to conceal.

VYCE: Of course, if you're going to flaunt your pleasures in the face of the public——! Bill, if I'm going to help you out of this mess, you'll have to confide in me.

POWER: That's just what I've been doing!

VYCE: That's all there is to it? Honest, now!

POWER: You mean to say you don't believe me?

VYCE: All I have to say is that if you were caught escorting an unknown woman from your room after two in the morning, I should have expected you to have a less preposterous explanation. And the "Tribune" will appear with it all to-morrow!

POWER: It won't be published to-morrow.

VYCE: So you bluffed Lukin, after all. But how?

POWER: As the truth didn't go, I tried the other thing.

(*He sits at the table.*)

I told him the woman was my wife.

VYCE: That's worse than your other explanation. Everybody knows you haven't got a wife.

POWER: I've got to get one within three days. They'll hold the story till then, and the bye-election will be over by then. So if I produce a wife there's nothing in the story worth printing, is there?

VYCE: Excellent! And, of course, after this, she'll marry you.

POWER: She must.

VYCE: How long has this been going on?

POWER: Going on?

VYCE: These—the usual word is—assignations. Bit dangerous her coming here, though.

POWER (*angrily*): Look here, Vyce. I never saw her before last night. Why, I don't even know who she is!

VYCE (*with a long look at him*): Bill, then it's true! You've been telling the truth. I beg your pardon, old man; but you'll confess that the affair is preposterous. But surely you know her name?

POWER: No. I never really saw her. I was with her only a few minutes. I had turned out the light before I heard her scream; and I was too anxious to get her away to light up again. And before she left she put down a thick veil. Why, I wouldn't even recognise her if she stalked into this room this moment.

VYCE: But the address she gave the cabman.

POWER: Somewhere in Pott's Point. Number—number 37; yes, that's it—but I can't recall the street, even if I heard it.

VYCE: And you told Lukin she was your wife, and you're going to marry her! But how are you going to get hold of her again?

POWER: That's why I've taken you into my confidence. Can't you suggest something? I haven't got much time. She must be found.

VYCE: Isn't there anything about her that you could recognise her from?

POWER: Yes! I had forgotten. Miss Bimm!

EFFIE: Yes, sir.

POWER: Kindly bring me your handbag.

(*EFFIE takes the handbag from the drawer of her desk, hands him the bag and returns to her desk.*)

VYCE: Does your stenographer usually keep these little mementos for you?

POWER: She found it on the floor this morning. The woman must have dropped it last night.

VYCE: Then she's found! She'll have her card or her name inside.

(*He opens it and takes out, one by one, the usual contents of a lady's handbag—samples of dress material, some silver and coppers, a pocket mirror, hairpins, the inevitable chamois, powder, lip-salve, etc.*)

Nothing to distinguish her from every woman in the country—except the usual sheaf of unpaid dress bills. Well?

POWER: Well?

VYCE: How are you going to find her? Ah! She'll come back for her bag!

POWER: I thought of that; but perhaps she'll think she left it in the cab, or lost it in the street.

VYCE: It's our one chance. But, Bill, if she does come back, why, she might be married already!

POWER: I never thought of that.

VYCE: But she'll come back. There's something here that she'll come back for.

POWER: What's that?

VYCE: You!

POWER: I don't follow you.

VYCE: She will. Of course, you kissed her last night?

POWER: Good God, what for?

VYCE: Pity. I thought every man kissed the woman he found in his rooms after midnight. They always do on the stage. The woman expects it. Bill, how careless of you! How criminally careless! It's ruin! And if she comes back, and is married, it's ruin. And if she won't have you, it's ruin. You've taken on a good many stiff contracts in your life, Bill, and carried them through. But this! You've got Buckley's. Frankly, I see nothing for it but your immediate resignation.

POWER: I shan't resign.

VYCE: Even if the caucus made you, it would just be as bad. It would mean the smash up of the party. Oh, Bill! Dammit, man, why didn't you kiss her?

VYCE retires.

DIX: I'm sorry, sir, but there was a lady fainted in the lobby, and Gregory had to bring her in here. And when she came to I couldn't turn her out.

POWER: Where is she?

DIX: Waiting in my private room, sir.

POWER: Did she give her name?

DIX: Oh, yes, sir. Mrs. Arthur Pretty.

POWER: Oh, that woman. I won't see her.

DIX: But she made me promise, sir, that——

POWER: That's what I pay you for—to break promises when necessary. I won't see her.

HELEN PRETTY appears.

HELEN: Oh, I've read all the advertisements. Haven't you——?

(*Sees that DIX is not there.*)

POWER: That's all to it. I won't see her—or any woman.

HELEN: Oh, yes, Mr. Power, you will. You really can't help it, can you?

(*DIX signals to EFFIE, who rises, taking her notebook, crosses to her chair, and proceeds to take a shorthand note of the interview.*)

(*HELEN PRETTY comes confidently forward to greet POWER, but pauses, disconcerted, as she perceives that he does not recognise her.*)

POWER: Mrs. Pretty, I believe?

HELEN (*accepting the formal manner*): Mr. Power?

POWER: I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before. We, may I say unfortunately, belong to different parties. Please sit down. I can give you five minutes.

HELEN: Thanks.

POWER: Now, what can I do for you?

HELEN: So this is where you run the country from?

POWER: No, Mrs. Pretty, this is the office of the servant of the people.

HELEN: The people treat their servant better than I do mine.

POWER: We are seeing to that. There is a bill being prepared imposing penalties upon employers who do not provide proper accommodation for domestics.

HELEN: It would be more useful if it provided domestics to occupy the proper accommodation. But it was about my estate I wanted to see you.

POWER: Wyonora? The biggest estate in the country. Yes?

HELEN: A rumor has reached me that——

(*Noticing EFFIE reporting the interview.*)

Is that young lady taking down all I say?

POWER: Yes, she is reporting the interview. I must have a record.

HELEN: But I'm not making speeches. I'm just chatting. (*To EFFIE*) Would you kindly read a book or pat your nice hair?

POWER: A Premier does not have private conversations.

HELEN: How dull for you!

(*EFFIE has resumed her reporting.*)

My dear young lady, do you know that your pretty blouse is unbuttoned at the back?

EFFIE: Oh, is it?

HELEN (*rising and going to her, where she pretends to button up the blouse, which, of course, is already buttoned. HELEN, however, contrives to unbutton two buttons*): There! I'm afraid I'm too clumsy. Perhaps the Premier? Oh, no, that nice clean young man would be delighted. Run away, and tell him to hurry.

(*EFFIE, confused, crosses hurriedly to DIX, who fumbles over the job.*)

HELEN: Now! I heard a rumor that you intended to confiscate my estate.

POWER: Rumors, madam? May I ask the source of your information?

HELEN: Oh, I don't mind telling you. Mr. Harrington.

POWER: The leader of the Opposition?

HELEN: Yes, he happens to be engaged to me, though you're the first man beside himself to know it.

POWER: Allow me to congratulate you, Mrs. Pretty. Though, of course, we differ in politics, I have a great respect for Mr. Harrington as a man.

HELEN: Thank you. Then I take it the rumor is true? You mean to confiscate my poor estate?

POWER: Confiscate? No. We will pay you full value, plus ten per cent.

HELEN: But I don't want to sell Wyonora.

POWER: Madam, Wyonora is a splendid sheep-run, but it is empty of men. It lies, vacant, right against the railway line, which we built. Since you refuse to put that great stretch of fine land to its fullest use, the State must do so. The people are crying out for land, and you keep that land locked up—instead of smiling farms there are only sheep-tracks.

HELEN: But we get top price for our wool, and our men are well paid and happy.

POWER: But what right have you to keep so much land from the people?

HELEN: What right have you to take it from me?

POWER: The sacred cause of humanity, Mrs. Pretty.

HELEN: But it's mine. And I love Wyonora. It's my home.

POWER: The Government Bill will specifically reserve to you the homestead.

HELEN: That wouldn't be Wyonora.

(*EFFIE returns, with her blouse buttoned up, and resumes her reporting.*)

POWER: The interests of humanity are greater than the selfish interests of the individual.

HELEN: Mr. Power, that's all politics; and I've no doubt it would sound rather thrilling in a speech; but won't you be frank with me? You want my land merely for your political purposes. You are using it as a bribe to the voters of the electorate, so that you can get your man in.

POWER: I suppose your fiancé told you that! The resumption of your estate—and of other big estates—will doubtless have that result; but the cause of humanity is the force that has led my party to this legislation.

HELEN: I see. You can only talk politics. Now, Mr. Power, I want to make a personal appeal—not to the Premier, but to you. (*Noticing EFFIE*) Heavens! You've got a smut on your dainty nose!

(*EFFIE drops her pencil and searches for a handkerchief.*)

POWER: I cannot allow personal appeals. The community demands this bill in the interests of justice; the landless men of the State cry out for land, as in other countries the poor cry out for bread. I would be unworthy of the position I occupy, unworthy of my sympathetic instincts, if I failed to satisfy that hunger. And I cannot make any exceptions; the law would make no exceptions. Your estate is the first to be resumed simply because it is the largest, the most acceptable and the most convenient for closer settlement. Had I owned Wyonora, I could not have prevented its resumption by the State.

HELEN: I regard my estate, Mr. Power, as a sacred trust, handed to me by my late husband. He made Wyonora. He was the pioneer who went out into the desert and fought for a living in the wilderness. Fought against drought, against disease, against loneliness and distance. And he won, but wore out his life in the long battle. (*To EFFIE*) On the other side of your nose, my dear. Haven't you got a mirror in the room?

(*EFFIE rises and crosses to her desk, where she gets a hand-glass from her desk and examines herself anxiously.*)

HELEN: And now you come along and demolish all that he gave his life to build. But if he had lived, he would have fought you.

POWER: With what weapons?

HELEN: With a man's weapons. With your own weapons—with politics. But I am only a woman. So I have to fight you with mine. And I have none except my personal appeal to your—your chivalry.

POWER: There is no chivalry in politics. That went out when women got the vote. But you've got your weapon—the vote.

HELEN: Then you won't give way?

POWER: It is not in my power to give way.

HELEN: Then it is to be war between us?

POWER: As you will.

HELEN: Then you force me to use my woman's weapon?

POWER: The ballot-box?

HELEN: No.

(*EFFIE, after scrubbing herself, has returned to her seat.*)

HELEN: Ah, that's better, my dear. A smut makes a woman's nose look humorous, doesn't it? And women's noses can't stand looking that, can they?

EFFIE: There wasn't one, madam.

HELEN: Wasn't there? I'm so glad. I do hope you've got your pencil nicely sharpened? I see, Mr. Power, that you've found my bag.

POWER (*springing up in amazement*): Your bag? Yours?

HELEN: I thought I had left it in the cab; but I must have dropped it here last night.

(*EFFIE sits, too interested to take notes.*)

POWER: You!

(*He comes to her.*)

HELEN: I should have called this morning, any way, to thank you for what you did for me last night—or, rather, this morning.

POWER: My dear Mrs. Pretty, I hadn't the least idea that it was you.

HELEN: But didin't you recognise me again?

POWER: I never saw your face.

HELEN: You never tried.

POWER: Ought I to have?

HELEN (*lightly*): No man has ever insulted me so before. But I suppose Premiers aren't men.

POWER: You! And I have been scheming all the morning to discover you again. I even looked inside your handbag to find your name and address.

HELEN: You opened my handbag? I shall never forgive you. That's where we women keep our charm, our heart, and most of our complexion. But why this sudden desire to see me again? You never expressed the least wish last night.

POWER: Why——? Oh—just to ask if you'd got home safely. And all the while you were waiting outside in the lobby!

HELEN: Rather lucky I fainted, wasn't it?

POWER: Incredible luck!

HELEN: And fortunate that I left my bag here, and not in the cab?

POWER: I've always been lucky.

(*He considers.*)

My dear Mrs. Pretty, perhaps I've been a little hasty in my decision to include your estate on the list of runs to be resumed. I'd like—say, three days—to reconsider the matter. You see, in judging the suitability of your land for closer settlement, I've had to go solely on my agents' reports. I've never seen Wyonora myself.

HELEN: Then why not inspect it?

POWER: I shall be in the electorate within the next few days. Perhaps I might take the liberty of calling and having a look at it?

HELEN: Why not stay with me?

POWER: Thank you. But, mind you, I can give you no promise. If I find Wyonora unsuitable, of course——

HELEN: Then you'll come?

POWER: Yes.

HELEN: Not as the Premier, please. As my guest.

POWER: I'm afraid that would be impossible. I shall have to bring my secretaries.

HELEN: Secretaries? My good man, have you got more than that clean young man over there?

POWER: I've got seven. But don't be alarmed. If you'll allow me, I shall merely bring one, and, of course, a stenographer.

HELEN: Oh, we've plenty of room. There's only a few guests staying now. Mr. Harrington, of course.

POWER: Harrington. I was forgetting. But, since you've just got engaged, perhaps I'd better not——

HELEN: Oh, you won't be in the way. I'm not a silly, sentimental flapper. Then you'll come?

POWER: Delighted.

HELEN: When?

POWER: It must be within the next three days.

HELEN: I'm going back to-day. Can you come to-morrow?

POWER: Yes, I'll motor up.

HELEN: That's right. Well, good-bye.

(*They shake hands.*)

And I must thank you again for your kindness to me last night. You'll remember me again, won't you? It won't be necessary for me to leave my bag again? (*To EFFIE, who has been sitting too intent to take a note*) I hope, my dear, you got all that down? (*To POWER*) Till to-morrow, then!

(*POWER is showing her out, when she turns, indicating the private door.*)

HELEN: I think, if you don't mind, we'll go the same way. More private, isn't it?

(*They go out.*)

EFFIE: So it's her! The designing creature! The cat! Oh!

(*She sweeps across to DIX.*)

I can't stay here a moment longer. Tell Mr. Power I'm ill, tell him any lie you like.

(*Grabs her hat.*)

And I thought this hat would do it! Hat? It's not a hat—it's a tragedy! And hers! Must have cost a tenner, and she wasn't even conscious that she had it on! What chance have I?

(*Jambs it viciously on and stabs it with hatpins.*)

My heart's broken. Sneering at me about my blouse—one and elevenpence a yard, and she knows it! Said I had a smut on my nose—just to let me know the powder had rubbed off! Oh! I'm going out to lunch, and I don't care what becomes of me after!

EFFIE goes tempestuously.

GREGORY, against whom EFFIE had collided as she went out, enters.

GREGORY: I told you so. It all comes of letting that woman in.

DIX: It was you who brought her in. And as for Miss Bimm, I rather thought she looked quite charming in a temper. Never guessed she had so much in her. And, personally, I preferred her hat to Mrs. Pretty's.

GREGORY: You, too! Females! Ugh!

GREGORY retires.

POWER re-enters.

POWER (*thoughtfully moving in front of table, and standing, then calling*): Dix!

DIX: Sir?

POWER: Order my motor to meet me at Woollaroo at 2 a.m. You and Miss Bimm come with me to Wyonora.

DIX: Yes, sir.

POWER: Ask Vyce to see me at once.

DIX (*going to the telephone on his table*): Yes, sir.

VYCE enters.

POWER: Just ringing for you, Vyce.

VYCE: Any clue?

POWER: The lady herself.

VYCE: Married?

POWER: Widow.

VYCE: Willing?

POWER: Possibly.

VYCE: Propose?

POWER: To-morrow.

VYCE: Where?

POWER: Wyonora.

VYCE: Name?

POWER: Mrs. Arthur Pretty.

VYCE: Mrs. Pretty! Why—why, I've just had a ring from my wife to tell me that it is rumored that Mrs. Pretty is engaged to Harrington, the leader of the Opposition.

POWER: So Mrs. Pretty told me.

VYCE: Well?

POWER: She asked me to visit Wyonora to-morrow. I'm going to inspect it—whether it is suitable for resumption under the Empty Estates Bill.

VYCE: But you know it is!

POWER: Of course. That's merely an excuse to see her. All's fair in—politics.

VYCE: And you really think——?

POWER: I've tackled bigger jobs than this, and carried them through.

VYCE: But a woman like Mrs. Pretty! Why, she's a society leader, and no fool. And engaged to Harrington!

POWER: And is winning a woman much harder than winning a premiership?

VYCE: Ah, I see. You *did* kiss her last night!

POWER: No; but I will to-morrow.

VYCE: You're in love with her?

POWER: In love. God forbid! Don't joke on serious subjects. I've got to marry her. That's all. And in three days. That doesn't leave much time for love-making, does it? Even if I knew how.

VYCE (*throwing up his hands*): Bill, I often used to wonder whether you were a clever man, or merely a fool with luck. I know now—but you'll need all your luck.

VYCE goes out.

POWER: Dix!

DIX: Sir?

POWER: Ever been married, Dix?

DIX: No, sir.

POWER: Pity. How does a man get married in a hurry?

DIX: Gets a special licence, sir, I think. But I fancy the registrar gets you over the mark quicker.

POWER: Find out the nearest registrar for marriages to Wyonora homestead; and fix up all arrangements for me to be married to Mrs. Arthur Pretty within three days—to-morrow afternoon, if possible.

DIX (*without showing the least surprise*): Yes, sir.

POWER: If it can be arranged, you might leave the lady's name blank. I might change my mind.

DIX: I see, sir. The essential thing is that you should be married—the particular lady does not matter?

POWER: Exactly. But I think you can go ahead with the name of Mrs. Pretty.

DIX: Yes, sir.

GREGORY returns, and crosses to POWER, who has resumed his seat behind the table.

GREGORY: Those deputations outside, sir. They're getting restive.

POWER (*plunging into work again*): Bring them in.

GREGORY (*hesitates and returns*): Beg pardon, sir, but I hope you'll give me the usual recommendation.

POWER (*busy, not looking up*): Why, you're not resigning, Gregory?

GREGORY: No, sir. But you are.

POWER: You think? And who is the recommendation to?

GREGORY: The next Premier, Mr. Harrington, sir.

POWER: Oh, then it will be time to ask for your recommendation in ten years' time. You don't back Harrington against me, I hope?

GREGORY: I'm not the referee, sir.

POWER: Who is?

GREGORY: The female, sir. Good-bye, sir. It has been a pleasant connection, but I knew it wouldn't last. The moment I saw that hat in the lobby, sir——

POWER: Rather a smart hat, don't you think, Gregory? There, run away and bring in that famished deputation.

(*GREGORY raises his hands hopelessly and goes out.*)

(*POWER plunges into work again, utterly absorbed.*)

(*CURTAIN.*)

ACT TWO.

The living room at Wyonora Homestead is a big room with parquetted floor, comfortably furnished with big chairs covered with flowered chintz. No pictures are on the walls, which are devoted to well-filled bookcases. There is a grand piano, tables littered with illustrated papers, magazines, photographs and vases waiting, empty, for flowers. Tall stand lamps light the room in the evening. At present, however, as it is the bright forenoon of the following day, the illumination of the room comes from two big French windows at the back, opening out on a broad verandah, beyond the balustrade of which there is a glimpse of garden and a distant blue range of low hills. There are doors—on the right opening from the hall, and on the left leading to another room. Near at hand there is a big open fire place with settees.

MRS. CUSACK, an aristocratic-looking old lady, is sitting, reading an illustrated paper. She yawns, rises and strolls about the room. Prominent among the many photographs is one of WILLIAM POWER. She takes it up with surprise and scrutinises it with evident aristocratic disapproval.

HELEN PRETTY, in a charming simple morning dress, enters from the verandah. She is carrying a great bunch of wattle, which she proceeds to arrange in the vacant vases about the room, while talking to MRS. CUSACK.

HELEN: Lovely, isn't it, Mrs. Cusack?

MRS. CUSACK: I always say there's no wattle like the Wyonora wattle.

HELEN (*noticing the portrait in MRS. CUSACK'S hand*): Oh, the Premier!

MRS. CUSACK: I suppose you put it in this prominent position to flatter the inordinate vanity of the great man now he's honoring you with a visit?

HELEN: A strong face, don't you think, Mrs. Cusack?

MRS. CUSACK: I can't imagine, my dear, what you mean by having this man here. I know I shouldn't criticise; but I'm an old woman and an old friend, and I never thought that Wyonora would have a Labor agitator for its guest.

HELEN: I always thought him a great big hungry ogre; and when I saw him yesterday I confess he disappointed me. He didn't want to eat me at all; though he'd rather like to gobble up my estate. I found him most interesting.

MRS. CUSACK: So you brought him here, to dangle at your skirts! And you just engaged! I may be rude—I have a name for being rude—but what does Mr. Harrington think of this escapade?

HELEN: Mr. Harrington—I mean Vernon—you see, I'm so new to being engaged that I haven't accustomed myself to calling him by his Christian name—Vernon hasn't been consulted. I'll tell him when he arrives. He's driving over for lunch.

MRS. CUSACK: I sometimes think, Helen, that you forget that you're a very pretty woman.

HELEN: I hope I shall never forget that. But Mr. Power is safe. He's armored all over.

MRS. CUSACK: By his vanity.

HELEN: No; by his bigness. He's a strong man.

MRS. CUSACK: Hm! By the way, where is the strong man?

HELEN (*indicating the door*): In there. Working hard. I haven't seen him yet.

MRS. CUSACK: I heard his motor arrive this morning—a loud, democratic motor, that woke me up at a most democratic hour.

HELEN: He motored up in the night.

MRS. CUSACK: Doesn't he ever sleep?

HELEN: They say the only chance he gets is in the House when he's being attacked by the Opposition. He always drops off when Vernon is speaking.

MRS. CUSACK: But who's he got in there with him?

HELEN: Only his secretary and a typewriter girl.

MRS. CUSACK: My dear, has he the impudence to bring his harem with him?

HELEN: Harem? (*Startled, dropping some of the wattle.*) That girl? Nonsense; he has to travel with his staff.

MRS. CUSACK: Like royalty!

HELEN: Oh, no. This is practically a private visit. If it was a political one he'd bring half-a-dozen secretaries.

MRS. CUSACK: Then it's merely as your guest that he's here?

HELEN: Oh, I'd like him merely as a guest; but it happens there is a teeny little bit of business mixed up in it.

MRS. CUSACK: Then it's true that he wants to steal this place from you and give it to the cockies and the unemployed?

HELEN: I'm afraid he still has that idea.

MRS. CUSACK: Then why——? I see. You're going to——

HELEN: Persuade him to let me off.

MRS. CUSACK: Persuade? How?

HELEN: I'll just be nice to him.

MRS. CUSACK: How nice?

HELEN: You've reminded me that I'm a pretty woman.

MRS. CUSACK: Then permit me to remind you that you're engaged to Mr. Harrington.

HELEN: That's why I must hurry. This is my last chance.

MRS. CUSACK: You're going to flirt with that man?

HELEN: No; I shall play fair. I shall appeal to his common sense.

MRS. CUSACK: You'd have more chance, Helen, if you appealed to his common heart.

HELEN: It's to save Wyonora.

MRS. CUSACK: You may have to pay too big a price. He's not the sort of man you get anything for nothing from. Flirtation is very well, and you do it charmingly. But with one of your own class. Remember, this man does not know the rules.

HELEN: Oh, he's safe. I found that out when I saw him in town yesterday. He's a mere machine—all cog-wheels. Oh, a very strong and efficient machine. Why, when I went to see him, he never even noticed my dress, or my new hat. He hasn't got a heart; he's got a dynamo. He's just an elemental force like a thunderstorm.

MRS. CUSACK: Take care, Helen, that you're not caught in that thunderstorm.

(*POWER'S voice is heard raised threateningly in the next room.*)

MRS. CUSACK: Listen! It's growling now!

HELEN: Oh, I can always run to shelter. That's what Vernon is for. But Mr. Power is quite safe.

MRS. CUSACK: My dear, you seem to have found out a great deal about Mr. Power in your one meeting with him.

HELEN: I saw him twice. I spent most of the night before last in his private office.

MRS. CUSACK: Helen!

HELEN: Quite an adventure, Mrs. Cusack. I called and waited all the afternoon in the lobby to see him, but he never came. Then, as there was nobody about I went into his room to wait. I was very tired; and you know I had been travelling all the previous night without a wink of sleep. So I plopped into a big comfortable arm chair behind a tall screen—these premiers do themselves remarkably well—and dropped off. And I slept till after two o'clock.

MRS. CUSACK: In the morning?

HELEN: Um. And I wouldn't have wakened then if the Premier hadn't clumsily knocked over the screen.

MRS. CUSACK: Gracious, the Premier! Was he there all the time?

HELEN: He had been working there since ten o'clock that evening. He was almost as much surprised as I was. It shows, anyhow, that I don't snore.

MRS. CUSACK: And then?

HELEN: He behaved like a perfect gentleman.

MRS. CUSACK (*horrified*): No?

HELEN: Took me out and put me in a cab and sent me home.

MRS. CUSACK (*relieved*): Oh! But did anybody see you?

HELEN: At that hour? Of course not.

MRS. CUSACK: Thank heaven! But if they had!

HELEN: It would have looked rather compromising, wouldn't it? But we could have explained.

MRS. CUSACK: My dear, it doesn't sound very convincing to *me*.

HELEN: I don't wonder. The whole thing was too absurd.

MRS. CUSACK: And Mr. Power—— Did he——?

HELEN: No; he didn't kiss me—not even in the dark. He didn't even try. And I've been wondering why ever since.

MRS. CUSACK: Helen!

HELEN: Oh, I wouldn't have let him. But surely any man would have tried? It's hardly a compliment to me, is it? I'm afraid I must be going off. And it would have given just that little emotional touch that the situation lacked. But possibly it never occurred to him. He's not a man; he's a machine. But you'd think that even a machine would sometimes be wound up, wouldn't you?

MRS. CUSACK: Hm! Of course it is your duty to tell Mr. Harrington.

HELEN (*moving up to the French window*): If Mr. Power had taken advantage of me, I should have felt bound to tell Vernon; but as he didn't, I couldn't possibly tell him. Vernon would think he had! Oh, there he is, coming up the garden.

MRS. CUSACK: I think you're wise, Helen. Mr. Harrington mightn't believe your absurd story any more than *I* do! I'll run away and leave you to your fiancé.

HELEN: Oh, don't go.

(*But MRS. CUSACK does.*)

VERNON HARRINGTON enters through the French window.

(*He is a man well preserved, sleek and well-groomed. His features are carefully masked—a man of passions quelled but not quenched, and cold of eye.*)

HELEN: Ah, Vernon, you're early.

VERNON: I was impatient to see you again, Helen.

(*She submits to his proprietary kiss.*)

How charming you're looking, dearest!

(*Holding her face between his hands.*)

There's such a light in your eyes. You *are* glad to see me!

HELEN: Of course.

(*Escaping from him.*)

Vernon, don't. Somebody might see.

VERNON: There's nobody here but Mrs. Cusack and the servant, and they don't matter.

HELEN: But I've got another visitor.

VERNON: Indeed! But we don't want anybody else, do we? I should have thought that you'd have kept everybody else away. Who is the intruder?

HELEN: Mr. Power.

VERNON: Not the Premier?

HELEN: Yes.

VERNON: What's he doing here?

HELEN: I asked him up, when I saw him in town yesterday.

VERNON: But why?

HELEN: He works so hard, doesn't he? I thought he was looking a little run down.

VERNON: But—you don't know him.

HELEN: Why, we got on quite nicely together; and I confess I rather like him—though to say that one likes a Premier is rather like admitting a friendship with an avalanche. He struck me as rather avalanchey.

VERNON: Helen, do you mean to say that you invited him up here as your guest?

HELEN: Why shouldn't I? There, silly boy! That wasn't my only reason. I wanted to talk business.

VERNON (*relieved*): Business? Oh, about Wyonora.

HELEN: Yes.

(*Sitting.*)

He seemed to be impressed by my arguments. He decided to come up here and inspect the estate itself before finally deciding whether it was suitable for closer settlement.

VERNON: And you really think that you can influence Bill Power? My dear Helen, he has made up his mind—and when Bill Power makes up his mind——!

HELEN: Yet he accepted my invitation—jumped at it.

VERNON: He's playing with you. I don't know what his game is; but you've laid yourself open to a snub, Helen, I feel hurt, deeply hurt, that you didn't consult me before rushing into this hare-brained scheme.

HELEN: But it only flashed upon me when I saw him in town. And he arrived here at some unearthly hour this morning, and had his breakfast in his room, and started making speeches to hns typewriter girl immediately after, shut up in that room. I haven't even seen him yet.

VERNON: You haven't seen him? Good.

HELEN: What do you mean?

VERNON: I'll see him.

HELEN: But, Vernon, I asked him up here to see me.

VERNON: He's your guest, of course; but in a business matter such as this I'm your representative.

HELEN: Oh, but you'd spoil it all. It would be merely a political conference.

VERNON: But surely I!

HELEN: Vernon dear, when I accepted you, I didn't accept a business representative. I feel quite capable of managing this affair myself.

VERNON: How? You think you can convince Power where I have failed?

HELEN: You've only used arguments—they never convince anybody—not even politicians.

VERNON: And what will you use?

HELEN: My eyes.

VERNON (*in horror*): You're going to——?

HELEN: Exactly. It's the only way. If it's possible to flirt with a block of granite I'm going to flirt with Mr. Power.

VERNON: But no decent woman would use those weapons.

HELEN: They're the only weapons Nature has provided us with.

VERNON: But that is a dangerous game for women to play.

HELEN: It's the only game you let us women play. And all's fair in love and politics.

VERNON: And this is—which?

HELEN: I can't tell yet. Probably a teaspoonful of each.

VERNON: I'm afraid, Helen, I must forbid this mad scheme.

HELEN (*quickly jumping up*): Forbid?

VERNON: I cannot allow my future wife to bring herself into contact with that man.

HELEN: Can't allow? Vernon, you adopt that tone to me?

VERNON (*seeing he has gone too far*): I beg your pardon.

HELEN (*carrying it off with a smile*): You big stupid! Do you know what's the matter with you?

VERNON: With me?

HELEN: You're jealous! Yes, actually jealous! You think I'm in love with Mr. Power.

VERNON: In love—with him? Nonsense. You're engaged to me, aren't you? But the ludicrous possibility has just occurred to me that Power is in love with you.

HELEN: Ludicrous? Why shouldn't a nice clean man fall in love with me? You did, yourself. Do you really think so? Wouldn't that be exciting? But no; it's impossible. Why, Mr. Power never even offered to——

VERNON: To what?

HELEN: To compliment me on my new hat. He never even noticed that I had a hat on.

VERNON: You wanted him to?

HELEN: Any woman would. That's why we wear hats. Goodness knows they aren't of any other use.

VERNON: There, you see. He's not a man. Now just leave this little worrying business in my hands.

HELEN: But I'm just looking forward to it.

VERNON: Then, Helen, I can only say——

HELEN (*putting her hand to his mouth*): Don't say it, please! Why—why, it's almost a quarrel—our first quarrel. And we're just engaged. Dear, let us kiss and be friends. There! When we're married, I'll be a good meek little girl, and do as I'm told, but——

CHARLES LUKIN is shown in by a maid.

MAID: Mr. Lukin, ma'am, to see Mr. Harrington.

VERNON: Ah, Lukin, you want to see me?

LUKIN: On urgent business, sir.

VERNON: Helen, this is Mr. Lukin, the representative of the "Tribune"—Mrs. Pretty.

HELEN: How are you? I suppose it's politics? I'll run away. But I expect you to stay to lunch, Mr. Lukin.

LUKIN: Thank you, Mrs. Pretty.

HELEN goes out.

VERNON: What's the matter, Lukin?

LUKIN: The "Tribune" has got hold of some important private information—something we can't publish yet, but something the editor thinks you should know.

VERNON: Damaging to the Labor crowd?

LUKIN: Immensely.

VERNON: Go on.

(*POWER'S voice is heard—a great roar of laughter—in the room outside.*)

LUKIN (*startled*): What's that? It can't be——?

VERNON: Yes, it's the Premier.

LUKIN: Here?

VERNON: In the enemy's camp. He's here on business—inspecting the estate.

LUKIN (*lowering his voice, with a look at the door*): What I have to tell you, Mr. Harrington, concerns the Premier—personally. I shouldn't like him to catch me here with you, sir.

VERNON: I see. Come into the garden.

(*He leads the way, and together they exeunt through the French window, and disappear, talking, into the garden.*)

WILLIAM POWER enters, followed by DIX.

POWER: There! That's finished. There's nothing else important, is there?

DIX (*with open notebook, reading*): Um——

POWER: Run over the list.

DIX: Those appointments to that Royal Commission, sir.

POWER: Postpone them.

DIX: The Secretary's of State urgent cable.

POWER: Keep the Secretary of State waiting. Does those English Johnnies good. Keeps 'em awake.

DIX: Inspect Wyonora.

POWER: Did that in the motor last night.

DIX: See Mrs. Pretty.

POWER: Ah, I knew there was something I'd forgotten. Important, too. Dix, make that the first order of the day.

DIX: Shall I tell her that you wish to see her, sir?

POWER: Yes. No! I don't know how to begin. I must work up my speech.

DIX: Speech, sir?

POWER: I'm going to propose to her. You don't imagine I can marry her without proposing? Draft me a proposal. To a widow—love, respect, devotion to the public—I mean, devotion to the widow. You know the sort of thing.

DIX: I'm afraid, sir, I couldn't draft that sort of speech.

POWER: Why, aren't you my private secretary? What do I keep you for? Haven't you ever proposed to a widow? Can't you draft a simple proposal?

DIX: Not a proposal of marriage, sir.

POWER (*vexed, at a loss, then calls*): Miss Bimm!

EFFIE BIMM enters.

POWER: Miss Bimm, you've been in love?

EFFIE: Dozens of times, sir.

POWER: Any proposals?

EFFIE: Fifteen.

POWER: Good. Just jot me down a precis of the points made by your fifteen admirers when proposing—the points that specially appealed to you.

EFFIE: I'm afraid, sir, what most appealed to me could not be expressed in words. In fact, it wasn't words. But no, sir. The subject is too sacred. I rejected them all, except the last one—and I haven't made up my mind about him unless he's more definite. And the whole fourteen went on something awful—threatened never to kiss me again.

POWER: Quite right, Miss Bimm. I respect your womanly instincts. But you could tell me how they began. The opening address, eh? How did they lead up?

EFFIE: Most of 'em just kissed me, sir. It seemed to give them confidence.

POWER: But I couldn't possibly start like that.

EFFIE: It's always done, sir; and a shoulder to lean on makes it so much more comfortable for the lady. In the last case, Mr. Dix—— (*DIX makes a hopeless gesture.*)

POWER: Dix?

EFFIE: Yes, in the motor last night.

POWER: But *I* was in the motor last night.

EFFIE: You were asleep.

POWER: Well?

DIX: Sir, I must protest. Such moments are sacred.

POWER: I can't allow that, Dix. The personal feelings of individuals must not be considered when public affairs are at stake. (*To EFFIE*) How did he begin?

EFFIE: I know how he would have liked to begin. But you were lying between us, sir, with your feet up. He squeezed my hand.

POWER (*making a mental note*): Squeeze her hand! But he had to stretch over my feet, eh?

EFFIE: Oh, no. My hand happened to be over his side. Then he whispered "Duckie!"

POWER: "Duckie!"

EFFIE: "Duckie Dumpkins," I think it was—no; that was Charlie, the thirteenth.

POWER: "Dumpkins!"

EFFIE: And he said he worshipped the very typewriter my pretty fingers played on.

POWER: But Mrs. Pretty doesn't play on a typewriter.

EFFIE: Mrs. Pretty? He wasn't proposing to her. I'd just like to catch him! If I thought he meant to I believe I'd accept him.

POWER: Calm yourself, Miss Bimm. What did he say next?

EFFIE: I couldn't hear. You snored.

POWER: And then?

EFFIE: That was all. It was the most unsatisfactory proposal I've ever had—like tea without sugar.

POWER: And in your opinion—as an experienced woman—fifteen, wasn't it?—was that an attractive proposal? Did your heart thrill to his impassioned words?

EFFIE: Fat lot of good if it had! We were separated by your feet. We were worlds away. Besides, I love another.

DIX (*who has stood on tenterhooks listening, turning away with a sigh of relief and moving up to the French window*): Ah!

POWER: And hasn't this other proposed?

EFFIE: Not yet, sir. He doesn't know. He is blind—blind! I did have hopes yesterday, but now—now—(*breaking down*)—now I know he loves another, and oh, Mr. Power, my heart is breaking, and I do so need a nice cosy manly shoulder to weep upon!

(*She throws herself into POWER'S arms.*)

HELEN PRETTY inopportunely appears.

HELEN: Oh, good-morning, Mr. Power.

(*Noticing EFFIE.*)

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know you were busy. I'll go.

POWER: No. Dix, remove this moist young woman.

(*DIX removes her limp and sobbing form.*)

Better mop her up. Take her into the garden and let her dry in the sun.

DIX: Certainly, sir. (*To EFFIE*) There, duckie! Come out into the garden and have a real good cry. I don't mind my suit.

EFFIE (*through her tears*): Anyway, I did weep in his arms—and that's more than any other woman has been able to say!

EFFIE goes out triumphantly, supported by DIX.

HELEN: I feel I am keeping you from your work, Mr. Power. I never knew before a Premier had so much to do.

POWER: But, Mrs. Pretty, I particularly wished to talk to you.

HELEN (*looking out at the garden*): Now, that's too bad! I thought those poor things had the garden to themselves—they need it, don't they? And there's Mr. Harrington and that reporter man there, too!

POWER: A reporter? Why, that's Lukin, of the "Tribune"!

HELEN: Yes; he said he had some important news for Mr. Harrington. I left them here. Politics, I suppose. That's the only thing you men think important. But it *does* seem important, doesn't it? Look at Mr. Harrington. I've never seen him so excited, not even when he——

POWER (*returning*): Lukin up here! And confiding in Harrington! I've no time to lose. He's told him.

HELEN: Told him what?

POWER: Something, Mrs. Pretty, that makes it imperative for me to speak.

HELEN: About my poor estate. You've decided——?

POWER: No; it's not about Wyonora, but a much more serious subject. It's about—er—a woman.

HELEN: A woman?

POWER: The woman I've decided to marry.

HELEN: That pretty little typewriter girl you carry round with you, who wept so picturesquely on your shoulder? Well, why don't you? Anybody can see she's in love with you.

POWER: Miss Bimm in love with me?

HELEN: Head over her pretty Cuban heels.

POWER: But I'm old enough to be her father.

HELEN: So was my poor husband. But the modern girl doesn't want a mere husband. She likes someone who has sufficient experience to settle down to *remain* a husband. Even the flapper distrusts any hair that isn't slightly grey.

POWER: But what could Miss Bimm find to love in me?

HELEN: Perhaps it was your shoulder. It looks such a comfortable shoulder to weep upon.

POWER: But she never gave me the least cause to suspect——

HELEN: On the two occasions I've seen you together she's done nothing all the time but tell you.

POWER: She never said a word.

HELEN: I heard her quite distinctly. Every look she gave you shouted it. But men are so deaf. Why, for all you know, I might be in love with you.

POWER: You?

HELEN: Oh, I can understand that little girl's infatuation. You're so big and burly and stupid.

POWER: Mrs. Pretty, you make it easier for me. Would you kindly sit down?

HELEN (*amused, sitting*): Thank you.

POWER (*drawing himself up as if about to make a speech to his constituents*): There comes a time, ladies—I mean Mrs. Pretty—when—er—the exigencies of—er—life insist upon that which—— No. What I was about to observe, Mr. Chairman, ladies, and gentlemen, is that a Premier is, after all, a servant of the people. His life, private as well as public, should be in accordance with the social and democratic life of this favored community; he should march shoulder to shoulder with the—that is to say—with the husband; he should——

HELEN (*laughingly applauding*): Why, you're making a political speech—to poor me!

POWER: Am I? Well, you see, they're the only sort of speeches I can make.

HELEN: Do you know, they rather bore me.

POWER: Do they? Er—Mrs. Pretty, has it ever occurred to you that beneath this devotion of mine to the public welfare, this sacrifice of my life to the incessant demands of the progressive amelioration of humanity, there might be——

(*He suddenly drops his labored speech and becomes natural.*) Dammit, Mrs. Pretty, will you marry me?

HELEN: Marry you? But you dear foolish man, don't you know I'm engaged to marry Mr. Harrington?

POWER: I didn't ask you if you were engaged. I asked you to marry me.

HELEN: Mr. Power, if this is a joke, I consider it in excessively bad taste.

POWER: A joke! Madam, I was never more serious in my life.

HELEN: But the thing is absurd. You a marrying man!

POWER: There's no law against getting married, is there?

HELEN: Yes, one.

POWER: Tell me, and I'll rush through a bill to amend it.

HELEN: Not even a registrar can marry a man who hasn't got the lady's consent.

POWER: You mean that you don't—er—love me?

HELEN: Love you, Mr. Power? And I just engaged to Mr. Harrington! I haven't begun even to analyse my sentiments toward you. We've practically just met. If you want me to humor you in this farce, I'll admit that I find you an interesting type, as long as you don't make speeches at me or ask me to marry you. And I confess that I—admire you.

POWER: Well?

HELEN: But even if I did love you, which of course I don't, it is usual for the gentleman to be in love with the lady.

POWER: Haven't I asked you to marry me?

HELEN: Anybody could do that. But he ought to have some excuse. Love is the usual one.

POWER: Love? I've had no time for love, Mrs. Pretty. In my life there has been no room for women. I've had a life of ceaseless struggle. I ran away from home to the gold-diggings when I was only a kid. I worked; I never found any gold; but there are plenty of opportunities for a willing chap on the diggings. Before I was sixteen I was getting a man's wages—and earning them. I saved my money. I never drank; and the women I was thrown into contact with had no attractions for me. Well, I got on. At last the chance came to start a store in a new rush. Luck was with me—luck has always been with me. That rush became a mining township; and as it grew my business grew. There were big profits to be made in those days—honest profits, too. And when civilisation came along it found me a rough, uncouth, uneducated young man, prosperous in a small way, but nothing but a country store-keeper. But even then there was in me a vague and vast ambition. I had sense enough to see what was wanting in me, and set to work to implant it. I began to educate myself—and you don't know how far down I had to start. I could not speak without dropping my aitches; I could not write a simple letter. But I said to myself that if I could make money I could make myself. And all that time do you think I could spare a moment for women? And love! What was there in this ignorant, rough young man for any woman to love? But at twenty-six I found the ladder by which I was to climb. And when I was elected a member of parliament for that rough mining constituency—not because I could make speeches, but because the miners trusted me, and I had grown up among their ideals—then I had sense enough to tell myself that, so far, I was only on the lowest rung of the ladder. I entered parliament a rough mining member, knowing the needs of my community, but unable to express them. I was laughed at by the tony members who had been to the universities; I became the butt of the whole House. Time or inclination, then, to fall in love? I saw that I hadn't begun my schooling. I went to a tutor, and learnt grammar and arithmetic and history. I found out the uses of libraries. So I slogged in, making myself over, night after night, and in between I made more money. And gradually the House learnt that I was something better than a laughing-stock. They found I could hit back—and hit hard. They began to see that behind my crudities I meant something and meant to get some-where. And my constituency believed in me and returned me again and again. And all the time the greater constituency of Labor was growing —and it, too, believed in me. So, in the ranks of Labor and in the ranks of the House I gradually forced myself forward, helped by nothing but my personality, driven on solely by my convictions and my curbed and secret ambition. No one but myself dreamed that the day was so near when Labor would rule the land. Time for women, then? Time for sentiment? And then the moment I had worked for came, and lifted me into the premiership. Time to relax then? Time to become acquainted with a sex I had so long ignored? Time to learn to love? More work crowded in on me, forced me back to the desk, chained me night and day. Time for women, then? Time even to understand them? Time for love? No!

HELEN (*who has listened with growing interest*): I understand, and I sympathise. I guessed something of this, else I would not have forgiven you for asking me to marry you when you knew I was engaged. But even if I weren't sufficiently a woman to want to be wooed, I must tell you that, though you have been able to bludgeon your way to the premiership, you can't bludgeon your way into marriage. I'm afraid, after all, that you're only fit to be a Premier.

POWER (*formally*): Mrs. Pretty, I ask you for your hand.

HELEN (*rising and giving him her hand*): My hand? Certainly.

You may hold it, without prejudice, for two minutes. But remember there's a ring already on it. Yes, you can squeeze it, if you like.

(*He does so, making her wince.*)

Thanks! But on one condition.

POWER (*suddenly cautious*): Conditions, eh?

HELEN: Yes, that you give up your mean scheme to take Wyonora away from me.

POWER (*dropping her hand*): Mrs. Pretty, you're talking business.

HELEN: Why, weren't you?

POWER (*after a pause, heavily*): Then it's no use? Then I had better go.

HELEN: You were really in earnest? You really thought that I, an engaged woman, would seriously consider a proposal from you? You actually took it for granted that I would listen to you?

POWER: Well, you did.

HELEN: Do you know why?

POWER: No.

HELEN: Perhaps it was merely a woman's curiosity; but, no; it was because I felt a certain sympathy with you. I was grateful for what you did for me the night before last.

POWER: But I didn't do anything.

HELEN: That's why. A man less honorable would have.

POWER: Done what?

HELEN: Taken advantage of the extremely compromising position in which I had placed myself to attempt to kiss me.

POWER: To kiss you, Mrs. Pretty! It never occurred to me.

HELEN: There! And it didn't occur to you to disbelieve my story. It never struck you that I, an unknown woman, might have taken that means to force myself upon you. After all, my story didn't sound very believable—even to myself.

POWER: Surely it wasn't all a trick? No; it couldn't be.

HELEN: Of course not. But you accepted my bare word, the word of a stranger, and a woman. You did not even attempt to see my face, nor ask my name. I was grateful for that. So when you asked me to marry you I didn't get up and go.

POWER: Miss Bimm was right. She said her proposals—and she'd had fifteen—always started with a kiss.

HELEN: Curious! Most—no; all—of my proposals started the same way. When you've got over this disappointment, if it is a disappointment—and you see some nice woman, brought up to be a Premier's wife, you might remember Miss Bimm's advice.

POWER: I see. I should have started by kissing you.

HELEN: Not at all. Perhaps you should have attempted to.

POWER: But if I had attempted to, I should have kissed you.

HELEN (*taken aback*): Oh, I believe you would. Well, no harm's done. And now I want your forgiveness.

POWER: For what?

HELEN: For deliberately leading you on.

POWER: Leading me on? I assure you I never noticed it.

HELEN: You wouldn't. But I confess I attempted to flirt with you. I took advantage of your feeling for me to try and induce you to give up your scheme for resuming Wyonora. But it didn't work. You didn't know how to flirt.

POWER: I see. You wanted to get something out of me. That's why you came to see me. That's why you were nice to me. That's why you invited me up here. My dear Mrs. Pretty, don't let that distress you. I'm accustomed to that sort of thing. Since I've been Premier

I've come to the conclusion that there isn't a single disinterested man in the world. Now, I see I must include women. But I should have liked to think that you——

HELEN (*impulsively and sincerely*): Oh, but I do—lots and lots!

POWER: Thank you. I believe you. Well, as you said, no harm's done. Let's shake hands.

HELEN: You forgive me?

(*Giving her hand.*)

Thank you. Really I think you're rather a dear.

(*POWER takes her hand, looking into her face. She uneasily drops her eyes. Impulsively he puts his arm round her, and is on the point of embracing her.*)

VERNON HARRINGTON appears at the French window.

VERNON (*pauses a moment in amazement, then strides forward, his arm raised*): You——!

POWER (*swinging HELEN aside, protectively*): Harrington!

HELEN: Vernon! Why didn't you come sooner?

VERNON (*with a sneer, white with passion*): Or later?

POWER: Mrs. Pretty is not to blame. She gave me not the least excuse nor encouragement. I apologise for my mad impulse. And now, if you'll allow me, I'll go.

VERNON: Not yet! Helen, I've just heard something that you'll be interested to hear.

POWER: From Lukin?

VERNON: Yes. And since Mrs. Pretty is your host, it is her duty to know.

POWER: It can't matter now. Tell her.

(*He turns, about to go.*)

VERNON: No; you wait and hear.

POWER: As you please.

HELEN: Vernon, I don't want to hear.

VERNON: You must. That man, whom you invited here as your guest, was involved, only the night before last, in a painful scandal of the grossest kind.

HELEN: The night before last?

VERNON: Yes. Though he bluffed Lukin from publishing the damning facts for a few days, Lukin felt it his duty to inform me, as leader of the Opposition.

POWER: He told you in confidence, didn't he?

VERNON: Yes, but this is a matter that concerns you in your capacity of guest at Wyonora. Your hostess has a right to know the whole story.

HELEN: Oh, but I'd be delighted to hear the dreadful thing that Mr. Power did the night before last.

VERNON: I think not. One minute.

(*He calls.*)

Lukin!

LUKIN enters.

VERNON: Lukin, kindly repeat to Mrs. Pretty the statement you have just made to me.

LUKIN: I hardly like—— You see, it was in confidence.

POWER: Go ahead, Lukin.

LUKIN: It's simply this. I happened to catch Mr. Power coming from his private room in the House in the early hours of yesterday morning with a woman.

HELEN: What sort of woman?

VERNON: What sort of woman would be coming from that man's rooms at that hour?

HELEN: It might be his sister, mightn't it? Or a charwoman?

POWER: I admit the facts, but I have already explained them.

VERNON: Oh, your explanation!

HELEN: What was it?

LUKIN: He said he didn't even know the lady's name. He had found her asleep behind a big screen.

HELEN: It doesn't seem very likely, does it? Though there is a big screen in Mr. Power's room. I saw it myself.

VERNON: Oh, there's another explanation, even more preposterous.

POWER: Lukin, you promised to withhold publication of your story for three days, on condition that I produced the woman.

VERNON: And you won't.

POWER: I find I am unable to do so. You can publish the whole thing to-morrow.

LUKIN: Really? Thank you, sir. I had better send a wire to the office at once.

HELEN: Surely there's no hurry, Mr. Lukin. I had expected you to stay to lunch.

LUKIN: No; there's no hurry. The whole story, explanations and all is set up, but it can't appear before the first edition to-morrow morning. All I have to do is to wire them it is O.K. And by this time the "Tribune" will probably have the woman's name and her statement.

HELEN: You'd never think it from the "Tribune's" editorials that it was so clever, would you? Then you'll stay to lunch?

LUKIN: Any time this afternoon will do for my wire. Thank you, Mrs. Pretty. I'll wait in the garden.

LUKIN goes out.

VERNON: I think I have shown you, Helen, that Mr. Power is fitted neither to be a Premier nor your guest.

POWER: I do not intend to trespass further on Mrs. Pretty's hospitality.

HELEN: No, Mr. Power. I couldn't think of letting you go without your lunch. I insist on your staying.

POWER: Thank you. And now as I've got some work to do——

HELEN: One moment, please.

(*POWER pauses.*)

(*To VERNON*) And what do you propose to do now?

VERNON: I must wait till to-morrow; then I'll expose him.

HELEN: But the "Tribune" will have done that.

VERNON: Not as well as I shall.

POWER: If you like, you can make it public to-day.

VERNON: To-day? I am addressing a big meeting at three.

HELEN: Then I suppose you'll tell your meeting this savory story?

VERNON: Yes.

HELEN: And it will win you the bye-election.

VERNON: There can be no doubt about that.

HELEN: But the woman?

VERNON: What about the woman?

HELEN: You'll expose her, too?

VERNON: Oh, she must take the consequences.

HELEN: But you don't know whom she is.

VERNON: Not yet. But I can trust the "Tribune" to unearth her.

HELEN: And you hope they'll find her, so that you can crucify her for your politics and kill her reputation?

VERNON: What's the reputation of one woman when so much is at stake?

HELEN: No matter who she is?

VERNON: No matter who she is.

HELEN: Even if she is innocent?

VERNON: Innocent? That woman?

HELEN: That woman is——

POWER: No, no!

HELEN: Yes!

(*To VERNON*) That woman is *me!*

VERNON: No! Impossible! You?

HELEN: Yes, it was me. I—— I went to sleep behind the screen.

VERNON (*with a savage snarl*): That story! You expect me to believe that? Oh, of course, you'll back your partner up. It's the only thing left for you to do. It's a pity you didn't decide between you on a better story.

HELEN: You—you don't believe me?

VERNON: Believe you? I believe that you spent the evening in that man's room, but asleep behind the screen! Nobody would believe you, nobody!

HELEN: Not even the man I am engaged to marry?

VERNON: Him least of all.

HELEN: Oh! Vernon! You!

VERNON: I find you here in that man's arms, and you think I'm fool enough to believe that it was for the first time!

POWER: Harrington! Take that back, take it back, or I'll——

VERNON: Oh, I believe you. (*Politely sneering*) I believe you both. Your explanation is so satisfactory that—that I have no further doubts.

HELEN: Vernon!

VERNON: I'm afraid I can't stay to lunch, Mrs. Pretty.

HELEN: Vernon! You can't mean——?

VERNON: Mrs. Pretty, I must say good-bye.

HELEN: Not good-bye?

VERNON: Good-bye.

VERNON, without any further leave-taking, goes out.

(HELEN stands thunderstruck, staring after him. The realisation of her dismissal slowly dawns on her. She glances down at her right hand, and stares at her engagement ring. Slowly she draws it off and drops it mechanically into a bowl of wattle, with a long sigh. Then she contemplates her finger again, miserably. POWER stands waiting, staring straight out, not seeing her.)

HELEN (*after a long look at him, shrugs her shoulders and moves toward him*): Mr. Power, you don't love me?

POWER: No.

HELEN: But you asked me to marry you. Why?

POWER: It was forced on me.

HELEN: Forced on you?

POWER: Lukin saw us coming from my room. He threatened to print the story, and the damning interpretation he put on it. He refused to believe my plain statement; so, to prevent him, I told him that the woman was my wife.

HELEN: Your wife?

POWER: Don't you see, a man's wife would be the only woman whose presence at that hour could give rise to no scandal.

HELEN: But then you told him that you didn't even know who I was.

POWER: No; it was pure bluff. At least it would give me three days. I got him to withhold publication for three days with the promise that I would produce the woman—my wife—within that time.

HELEN: Ah, I see. You did it to shield me, to save that unknown woman's reputation! Mr. Power, that is a thing for which every woman would honor you. And I—I thank you.

POWER: No. I am not that sort of man. I never gave a thought to you.

HELEN: Oh!

POWER: You have been frank with me, and all the time I have not been frank with you. I decided to marry that unknown woman——

HELEN: To save her reputation.

POWER: No. To save my own.

HELEN: Your reputation? But a man's reputation doesn't matter in affairs of this sort.

POWER: A man's doesn't; but a Premier's does. I had to gain time, to delay the publication of that libel till the bye-election was won. I thought I could find the woman and marry her. You see, I knew nothing of women. And now the story will be published to-morrow, and we'll lose the bye-election; and, of course, when this comes out, I shall have to resign the Premiership.

HELEN: Resign? Step down after you have climbed so high?

POWER: I couldn't keep a party behind me with the reputation I shall have to-morrow.

HELEN: That means that the Government will be defeated, and—and Mr. Harrington——

POWER: He'll make an excellent Premier.

HELEN: So you did it all in a desperate effort to save yourself.

POWER: And my party.

HELEN: Oh, you *are* your party. Then it was all selfish?

POWER: This world, Mrs. Pretty, is mostly for itself. And I am merely a politician—no hero. And so, having shown you what I am, I can only apologise for my mad intrusion into your life, and go.

HELEN: That's so like a man. Selfish? Yes, Because you're a man. And, like a man, you have never a thought of me?

POWER: You?

HELEN: Yes. Have you forgotten the shameful scene you witnessed just now? You saw Mr. Harrington break off his engagement with me. You saw him wound and scorn me. You saw him utterly shame me.

(*Coming impulsively to him.*)

I shall not lift up my beaten head again unless——

POWER: Unless what?

HELEN: Unless you marry me.

POWER: Marry you? But you have already refused me.

HELEN (*with an almost hysterical laugh*): You should always ask a woman twice! You forget that when I was bound, I was engaged to Mr. Harrington. You saw what came of that. Well, I'm a free woman again, a bitterly shaken woman, a humble woman. So, Mr. Power, there is no obstacle in your way if—if you'll only ask me again.

POWER: No, I could not do that. You mean to sacrifice yourself for me. I thank you for it, but I could not so ruin your life.

HELEN: But it is not myself I am sacrificing. It is you I ask to make the sacrifice.

(*Desperately.*)

Mr. Power, I ask you to marry me.

POWER: You mean it? But—but why?

HELEN (*hysterically*): Why? Oh, don't ask why! Don't ask anything! Just—just take me in your big strong arms and—and—comfort a little child that's got the miserables!

POWER: You poor little baby, yes.

(*He takes her gently in his arms. Though she expects it, he does not kiss her.*)

I see—— We two—— It's the only thing left for us to do.

HELEN (*through her tears*): There! I feel better already. What a comfortable shoulder you've got—and I'm sure it isn't padded—— Bill!

POWER: Yes, Mrs. Pretty?

HELEN: The men I'm engaged to usually call me Helen.

POWER: Well, Helen?

HELEN: Bill, I've got an idea. I think being engaged rather stimulates the brain, don't you? Bill, marry me to-day, please.

POWER: To-day?

HELEN: This afternoon. Don't you see? Being engaged doesn't seem to stimulate *you!* You promised to produce your wife within three days. Well, produce her now.

POWER (*suddenly alert*): And dish Harrington and the "Tribune," after all! No; don't move. Stay where you are. You might get some more ideas. I see, if we're married this afternoon, then Harrington can't say a word at his meeting to-night, and the poor old "Tribune" can't print a line!

HELEN: That's why. But, Bill dear, could we be married in such a hurry?

POWER: I arranged all that yesterday, the moment you had left.

HELEN (*releasing herself*): Arranged it?

POWER: Oh, Dix fixed it up with the nearest registrar—just in case you accepted me, you know.

HELEN: You do rush things, Bill. But I like you for it. So you knew all along I'd have you?

POWER: I was as sure you'd marry me yesterday as I was sure you wouldn't ten minutes ago.

HELEN: I might change my mind again. That's why I suggested us getting married this afternoon.

POWER: Come, I must introduce you to Lukin.

HELEN: But Mr. Lukin knows me.

POWER: Only one of you. I want to introduce him to two other people—the mysterious woman and my wife.

HELEN (*with meaning*): He's out in the garden. He couldn't possibly see us here.

POWER (*unconscious of her wish to be kissed*): That's why we must go to him.

They go out into the garden.

MRS. CUSACK enters.

(*She is surprised to find the room deserted. She goes up to the French windows and looks out.*)

MRS. CUSACK: Helen on the Premier's arm! And Harrington driving away like a man possessed!

Through the other French window to that at which MRS. CUSACK stands, DIX and EFFIE BIMM enter, hand in hand.

MRS. CUSACK: Another pair!

She goes.

EFFIE: It's a lovely garden, isn't it? I'd like a garden like that for our house, Herbert.

DIX: But I think Bill might have had the decency to leave the garden to us.

EFFIE: Do you know, Herbert, there was a time when I was just a teeny bit attracted by Mr. Power.

DIX: Him? Why he must be forty!

EFFIE: And fancy him being caught so easily by that designing creature, Mrs. Pretty! I can't for the life of me see what he can see in her. Why she must be nearly thirty! And a widow!

DIX: Here they come! Quick, come into this room. I haven't kissed you on the left ear yet.

EFFIE: Then I can't understand how you managed to miss it!

(*They fly.*)

POWER and HELEN re-enter.

HELEN: Wasn't he surprised! And disappointed! Never even congratulated us! Do you know, Bill, you've got a duck of a chin?

POWER: Have I? But if we're going to be married this afternoon, I must finish up my work.

HELEN: Work, now?

POWER: Oh, there's always work for a Premier.

HELEN: But we're just engaged, Bill.

POWER: That's what's wasted the time. All the preliminaries. I'll be finished in time for lunch.

(*He goes into the other room.*)

HELEN: I thought I was getting a husband—and all I've got is a Premier.

MRS. CUSACK returns.

MRS. CUSACK: Well, Helen, can you explain what's happened?

HELEN: I've broken off my engagement with Mr. Harrington, and I'm going to marry Mr. Power this afternoon.

MRS. CUSACK: Helen! Was it necessary for you to go to such lengths merely to prevent Wyonora being taken from you?

HELEN: Wyonora! Why, I've forgotten all about Wyonora.

MRS. CUSACK: Then hasn't Mr. Power promised not to steal it?

HELEN: I clean forgot to ask him.

MRS. CUSACK: Then why—*why* are you going to marry the Premier?

HELEN: The usual reason, Mrs. Cusack. Because I love him. I fell in love with him at first sight, behind the screen at two o'clock in the morning.

MRS. CUSACK: But how did you know?

HELEN: How do I know? My dear Mrs. Cusack, I'm a widow. And I'm head over heels in love with the great big, burly, silly baby!

(*A gong sounds.*)

MRS. CUSACK: That's lunch.

HELEN (*running towards the door*): Bill, dear! Bill! Billikins! The gong's gone for the wedding breakfast!

(*CURTAIN.*)

ACT THREE.

The same as in Act One. The time is midnight, a few days later. The House of Parliament is in session.

WILLIAM POWER is seen at his table, busily working, clearing out pigeon-holes and drawers, filing and destroying documents. His manner is grave and preoccupied.

VYCE, shown in by GREGORY, enters.

POWER: Well?

VYCE: It's all up, Bill. We're still one vote short—just the one vote we need to make it a tie and enable us to carry on till our absentee members can get back.

POWER: Wouldn't Thompson rat?

VYCE: I thought we could nobble him, but——

POWER: Wasn't our price high enough?

VYCE: Nothing we could offer would be high enough. He can't be bribed for his vote. He's been bribed already. Harrington has offered him a place in his cabinet.

POWER: I might have thought of that. It is just what I would have done myself when so much depended on one vote.

VYCE: The rotten luck of it all! Here we've got a working majority, an actual working majority; and Whittaker gets suddenly ill, and MacCallum's in New Zealand, and Harrington won't allow him a pair, and we get our man in at Wyonora bye-election, and the writ's not returned, and he can't take his seat till Wednesday! And down on us swoops Harrington with a censure motion!

POWER: Of course it's a snap division, but it's a censure motion, and the Governor must send for Harrington. Then he forms a ministry and goes straight to the country as Premier—and you know what that means!

VYCE: It's the dead finish, Bill.

POWER: Oh, we'll get our innings again some day. But to be snuffed out like this, after all I did! My sacrifice was useless.

VYCE: Your sacrifice? Oh, I see. You mean your marriage with Mrs. Pretty.

POWER: All that bother—and all useless.

VYCE: You're the first husband I've met who regarded his honeymoon as a sacrifice.

POWER: My honeymoon? There hasn't been a honeymoon.

VYCE: No honeymoon?

POWER: No marriage.

VYCE: But you told me you married her.

POWER: Legally, yes. But immediately after the ceremony I got wind of Harrington's motion of censure, and I motored straight down here.

VYCE: But Mrs. Power?

POWER: Mrs. Power? Oh, you mean the lady I married. I left her at Wyonora.

VYCE: As a married man, Bill, I think you made a mistake. Women don't easily forgive a thing like that.

POWER: Oh, I can't consider her feelings in a crisis like this. And after the division to-night I'll have plenty of time for this honeymoon foolery.

VYCE: You'll be a free man to-morrow—no, I mean to-day. It's a

quarter to one. Go back to Wyonora first thing and make it up. But I can't understand Harrington making this Compulsory Resumption of Empty Estates Bill the ground of his censure motion.

POWER: Why not? It's the only subject on which his party is unanimous.

VYCE: I grant you it was good political tactics on Harrington's part. But surely you forget that Mrs. Pretty's estate—I mean your wife's estate—is the first area to be resumed under your Bill.

POWER: Well, because I married her, is that any reason why I should go back on my policy?

VYCE: I see, she'll let you have your way.

POWER: I haven't discussed it with her.

VYCE: You haven't spoken to her about it?

POWER: The subject wasn't mentioned—no time.

VYCE: She'd have been dreadfully disappointed if you'd passed your bill.

POWER: Well, thanks to Harrington, it won't be passed.

VYCE: Thanks to Harrington! I say, Bill, has it occurred to you that she might have put Harrington up to this motion of censure?

POWER: What for?

VYCE: To save her estate. You won't help her. Why shouldn't she turn to the one man who can?

POWER: I don't know much about women, but I admit it seems rather likely. (*Thinking it over*) Yes, why shouldn't she? So I owe this to my wife? (*Grimly*) And you ask me to go straight to her now?

VYCE: I don't say she's done it. But you see, she turned Harrington down; and he's not the sort of man to give up. I often suspected that Harrington's passions swayed him more than he let us see. He's still in love with your wife; and here's his chance to show her he can serve her and humiliate you. He may be working for more than the Premiership; he may want your wife.

POWER: If she's been at the bottom of it, he's welcome to her. But talking won't do any good. It's no use keeping the debate going any longer, is it? Let's get back to the Chamber, and take the division as soon as Wells has finished his speech. Might as well get it over. It's nearly one o'clock, and I'd like a sleep.

VYCE: Well, good-bye, Bill. When we come back to this room again you won't be Premier.

POWER: Good-bye, old chap. It's all the luck of the game.

POWER and VYCE go out.

(*A knock is heard at the door.*)

(*GREGORY is surprised. He opens the door.*)

HELEN POWER enters.

(*She is in evening dress.*)

HELEN: Gregory, where's the Premier?

GREGORY: I'm not very sure, madam, who is the Premeer just now. But Mr. Power is engaged in the Chamber. If you'd wait till after the division——

HELEN: The vote hasn't been taken yet?

GREGORY: Not yet, madam.

HELEN: But are you sure? You wouldn't know here what's going on in the House.

GREGORY: I'd know by the division bell, madam.

HELEN: What's a division bell?

GREGORY (*indicating the division bell over the door*): That, madam. When a vote is being taken the bells ring all over the House to call the members in to record their votes.

HELEN: But what does Mr. Power want with one in here for? Wouldn't he hear the other bells ringing?

GREGORY: Not in this private room, madam. It's sound-proof, with double doors. The Cabinet meetings are held here; and it wouldn't do for anybody to overhear all the devilry that goes on, now, would it?

HELEN: I see. Please tell Mr. Power that I'm here, his wife.

GREGORY: Yes, madam.

GREGORY goes.

(HELEN, left alone, examines the room. Her attention is specially drawn to the division bell. She examines it carefully, then comes down.)

HELEN: Oh, if there was some way that I could help!

GREGORY returns, showing in POWER, and retires.

POWER: You! I thought you were at Wyonora.

HELEN: At home, when you were fighting for your life? You thought that I could stay sitting quietly there, with my useless hands in my lap, with not even a telegram from you to tell me how the battle was going! Bill, your wife is not that sort of wife. But, quick, tell me, what chance have you of winning?

POWER: None. He's caught us on the hop, with one of my party away ill, another away in New Zealand, and the writ for the bye-election not returned, so that Brown can't vote. So Harrington's party will just win, by one vote.

HELEN: Only one vote!

POWER: Oh, it's enough. (*Bitterly*) You ought to be satisfied with your work!

HELEN: My work? What have I done? Oh, if I only could do something!

POWER: Surely you've done enough?

HELEN: I don't understand. How could I——?

POWER: Let me remind you. I was called away down here immediately after my—our marriage. I don't blame you for being angry at my desertion; but that you should seek to revenge yourself in this way, and by that man——!

HELEN: Bill, what on earth are you talking about?

POWER: I'll be plain enough. You were angry because I left you. You knew that I was committed to the passing of the bill that would take Wyonora from you. So you turned to the one man who could prevent that bill passing.

HELEN: You think that I got Mr. Harrington to move this vote of censure? Oh, but you can't think that of me! That I plotted your defeat—and with that man! Why, I hate him.

POWER: That would not prevent you using him, would it?

HELEN: But what grounds, what evidence, have you got to show I could do this thing?

POWER: Oh, you're clever enough to hide your tracks.

HELEN: But I haven't seen Mr. Harrington, I haven't written to him.

POWER: Your very presence here, at this hour, confirms me. You came down to share in Harrington's triumph.

HELEN: I came down because I was torn with anxiety about——

POWER: About your estate.

HELEN: No; about my husband. Because I had hoped that in some way I could help you.

POWER: Help me? A woman?

HELEN: Your wife.

POWER: It is too late now, either to help or hinder. That bell will ring at any minute. I suppose you'd like to come into the Ladies' Gallery to see my defeat?

HELEN: No; I'm too upset, too hurt, too miserable to see anybody. Couldn't I wait here?

POWER: Very well.

HELEN: But you'll come straight back after I hear the bell and tell me the result, won't you?

POWER: Yes; but there can be only one result.

HELEN: Bill! You've made me your wife, and I am almost happy, because you will see how silly your suspicions are. And, Bill, I almost hope for your defeat.

POWER: I knew it!

HELEN: Because in your downfall perhaps—perhaps you'll feel the need of me. I shall wait here, and if it is not Premier who comes back to me, it will be somebody I love infinitely better—my husband.

POWER (*arrested by her sincerity*): Helen! It was Vyce who put these ideas into my mind. Convince me!

GREGORY enters with a note, which he hands to POWER.

POWER: I am wanted at once in the House. Wait here.

(*He goes out.*)

HELEN: Oh, to think that he should believe that I and Mr. Harrington——

(*Suddenly arrested by a new thought.*)

Mr. Harrington! Vernon! Why shouldn't I try?

(*Pulling herself together as she sees GREGORY waiting.*)

Gregory!

GREGORY: Yes, Mrs. Power?

HELEN: My husband tells me that the Opposition will beat him by just one vote.

GREGORY: One vote will be enough.

HELEN: But isn't there any chance that one vote could be won over from the other side?

GREGORY: Do you think, ma'am, that hasn't been tried. That's the first lesson in practical politics.

HELEN: But couldn't one of the Opposition be prevented from voting?

GREGORY: How?

HELEN: I think, if I were Premier, I'd strangle him.

GREGORY: That's just what Mr. Power would love to do—especially if it was Mr. Harrington. But it's rather risky, even for a Premeer.

HELEN: But there must be other ways.

GREGORY: I wish we knew them, madam. It would save the country all the expense of elections.

HELEN: Suppose—suppose——? There's none of the Opposition deaf, are there?

GREGORY: No. But why deaf, madam?

HELEN: It's a pity. If only one of their side was deaf he wouldn't hear the division bells ringing, would he? And if he didn't know the vote was being taken we'd win.

GREGORY: But even a deaf man would hear the division bells tonight, with such an important vote coming on.

HELEN: But suppose something went wrong with a bell, and it didn't ring?

GREGORY: He'd hear the other bells, madam.

HELEN: But if this bell didn't ring?

GREGORY: What made you think of that? Why, a couple of years ago something went wrong with the wire to that bell, and it refused to ring. The Premeer missed a division, but it wasn't an important one; and I got a new wire put in the next day.

HELEN: That bell? It might happen again, mightn't it?

GREGORY: Hardly likely, madam. And if the Premeer's bell didn't ring and he was in here, that would mean only an extra vote to the Opposition.

HELEN: I wasn't thinking of the Premier, Gregory. Wait a minute.

(*She seats herself at the table and scribbles a note, puts it into an envelope, addresses it, and hands it to GREGORY.*)

Please take this to Mr. Harrington at once.

GREGORY: Mr. Harrington! Oho! But I'm afraid there's no chance of him attending to it till after the division.

HELEN: I depend on you, Gregory, to make Mr. Harrington read this note before the vote is taken. You must!

GREGORY: Mrs. Power, you don't mean to say——?

HELEN: There's not a minute to waste.

GREGORY: I'll get it to him, madam. I'll make him read it! (*To himself*) Women! They'll dare anything!

(*He hastens out.*)

(*HELEN watches him till the door closes, then goes quickly up to the division bell, places a chair beneath it, mounts on it, rapidly strips one of her long gloves from her arm, and stuffs it carefully between the striker and the bell, effectually preventing it from sounding. She jumps down, replaces the chair, contemplates her work with satisfaction, seeing that the glove does not show, smiles, and returns to the table, where she sits in the Premier's chair, impatiently waiting.*)

HARRINGTON enters with her letter opened in his hand.

HELEN: Vernon! It was good of you to come.

VERNON: Mrs.—Mrs. Power, why did you write this?

HELEN: I felt I must see you—to make it up.

VERNON: It is too late for that.

HELEN: Well, then, to tell you that I am sorry.

VERNON: What the hell is the good of that?

HELEN: Vernon, won't you forgive me, even after the cruel way I've wronged you, if I say I regret——?

VERNON: You bring me here, at this hour of the night, when every moment is of importance, to talk! To explain! The thing's done, finished. There's nothing more between us. And I've no time to waste with you here. I've got more important business on hand.

HELEN: So you won't forgive me, Vernon? I came down all this way because I reproached myself with my unkind treatment of you. Oh, well. But I can't bear your leaving me for the last time as you did at Wyonora. Won't you just shake hands? Good-bye.

VERNON (*hurriedly taking her hand*): Oh, yes, I'll say good-bye.

HELEN (*holding it, eagerly*): Vernon, before you go out of my life for ever, I must tell you something. I have made the greatest mistake a woman can make.

VERNON: Ah! So you've found out already. So as a husband——

HELEN: Husband! He's not a husband. He left me the very hour we were married.

VERNON: Well, he made an honest woman of you, didn't he? That was all you wanted.

HELEN: Vernon! (*Recalled to her purpose*) I thought I loved him. I don't. Oh, why, why didn't you take me from him? (*Her hand*

caressingly on his arm) Vernon, it's you—*you* I love, I've always loved. It's *you*—I love still.

VERNON: I knew it!

(*Is about to draw her to him when he hesitates, and looks at her suspiciously.*)

No! You're trying to fool me. Trying to persuade me to let your husband off. No! Fool that I was not to see it! You're trying to keep me here, to prevent me recording my vote!

HELEN: How could you think that of me? I know I deserve your suspicions, but, Vernon, how could I keep you here against your will?

VERNON: No; I'd hear the bell.

HELEN: Of course you'd hear the bell. (*Caressingly*) Vernon, you can't know how he treats me. He said things to me just now that made me desperate. He flung me off; he almost struck me. The moment he left I scribbled that note to you. I mean every word of it. I don't care—I don't care what happens. His wife? After the things he said to me? Never! I'd like to show him—he has driven me to it. Vernon, can't you see? Here's your chance to revenge yourself on him.

VERNON: Revenge? I'll have my revenge the minute that bell rings. Isn't his defeat revenge enough?

HELEN: No; there's a greater one. When he returns from the Chamber, defeated, perhaps even wanting my sympathy and forgiveness, then, if I can tell him to his face that *I've* taken my revenge, too!

VERNON (*incredulously*): You don't mean——? The hint you gave in your letter?

HELEN: I mean everything—everything you could read into that letter, everything that I've said. I will tell him, that here—in this room of his—I——

VERNON: Ha! Yes, that would be good. But let *me* tell him!

HELEN: I don't care who does; but I know I could hurt him more. His wife! He called me—— He was right. Vernon! I know you love me!

VERNON: Love you? By God, yes! Helen! Mine!

(*He crushes her in his arms. But suddenly his old suspicions return. He puts her from him.*)

No! It's a trick, a plot, to keep me from voting. No; I'd hear the division-bell.

(*He takes her again in his arms.*)

Helen! My Helen!

(*Savagely and triumphantly.*)

His wife!

HELEN: Vernon, kiss me!

VERNON (*about to kiss her, suddenly smiles*): Wasn't that the screen that he found you behind that night?

HELEN: The dear old screen!

VERNON: Come.

(*He almost carries her behind the screen.*)

After a pause, POWER comes striding in, triumphant.

POWER: We've won! Harrington didn't vote. He's disappeared.

(*He pauses as he sees no sign of HELEN.*)

Why, she's gone. Must have gone to the Ladies' Gallery.

(*He turns to go. A slight sound behind the screen arrests his attention.*)

Why——?

(*He strides over and flings the screen down.*)

HELEN is seen standing by the window, as if she has just repulsed VERNON, who stands angrily regarding her.

POWER: Harrington? Here?

VERNON: The vote? The vote can't have been taken!

POWER: You didn't vote. So it was a tie, and we won by the Speaker's casting vote. And we've adjourned till next week, when we'll have our majority back.

VERNON: But I don't understand.

HELEN: Oh, Mr. Harrington, and I kept you! I'm so sorry!

VERNON: You! But the division bell?

POWER: They were looking everywhere for you. Nobody thought of looking in here.

HELEN: Mr. Harrington would stay chatting.

VERNON: But the bell!

(He goes quickly up and looks at the bell. He discovers the glove in it, unnoticed by POWER, and, reaching up, is about to take it out, when he stays his hand.)

(To himself) A trick! A woman's trick! *(To POWER, coming down)* I must congratulate you.

POWER: Thanks. It's all the luck of the game.

VERNON: Oh, not on your victory, but on your wife. *(To HELEN, meaningly)* I must thank you for the—the pleasant little chat we had—behind that screen. It was worth losing the Premiership for. Good-night.

(He goes off.)

POWER *(puzzled)*: So he was here all the time! Helen, you kept him here?

HELEN: It was fortunate that I did, wasn't it?

POWER: You did it on purpose, to save me?

HELEN: It wasn't much to do, was it?

POWER: But the Government's victory, and on that Resumption of Empty Estates Bill, means that we must go on with it and pass it—and you'll lose Wyonora.

HELEN: My estate? I never thought of that. I was only thinking of you.

POWER: But—— I don't understand. How did Harrington come here?

HELEN: I sent him a little invitation.

POWER: I see—— But how did you manage to keep him here, when he knew the vote was coming on?

HELEN: He must have forgotten all about the nasty vote.

POWER: Harrington forget?

HELEN: Why shouldn't he. I was rather nice to him—and I can be, you know—or, rather, you don't know—yet.

POWER *(whose puzzlement had been growing to suspicion)*: But Harrington's no fool. He'd hear the division bell. *(With sudden passion, jealously)* Helen, you kept him here, you say, *chatting* with you, when he knew the importance of this vote. He stayed there, behind that screen, with you, with that division bell and all it meant to him clanging in his ears! My God, Helen!

HELEN: I told you I had to be rather nice to him.

POWER: Nice! Yes, you women know how to be nice! You in Harrington's arms, at the very minute when I thought I had him beaten! Oh, you! You saved me, yes, but the price you paid! You—— No; I won't say it: you're my wife, you bear my name. But go!

HELEN *(delighted)*: Why, Bill, you're jealous! Really and truly jealous!

POWER: Jealous, yes! Jealous of my wife! My wife? No! Jealous of a woman who could hold that man in her arms, who could stop with her kisses the sound of that damned division bell!

HELEN: There! You are jealous! I do believe, husband, that you're really in love with me!

POWER: In love with you? God forgive me, yes! Madly in love —and with a woman who is no better than—— My wife!

HELEN: But I had to flirt the teeniest little bit with him, hadn't I?

POWER: Flirt! With that bell dinning in his ears.

HELEN: What bell?

POWER: The division bell over that door.

HELEN: I didn't hear any bell.

POWER: No; *you* wouldn't hear it.

HELEN: That bell up there, you say? I really cannot recollect it ringing. Perhaps it didn't ring?

POWER: It didn't for your lover—nor for you. And I married you. Pah!

(*Breaking down.*)

Helen, why, why when I must never see you again, must I want you so?

HELEN: I knew all along you loved me. So this is good-bye?

POWER: It must be.

HELEN: Then I'll go. (*Looking on the floor*) Dear me, I've dropped my glove somewhere.

POWER (*harshly*): Look behind the screen!

HELEN: Of course!

(*Goes up and looks.*)

Not here. I wonder——? Why, I really believe there it is stuffed in the division bell!

POWER: In the bell?

(*He goes to the bell, and reaching up extracts the glove.*)

How——?

HELEN: Stupid of me to forget. I put it there myself—before I sent for Mr. Harrington. You see, Bill, I didn't want him to hurry away.

POWER: It didn't ring. Then he didn't know the division was being taken! And you—— But Harrington said—— He said it was worth while!

HELEN: Bill, you don't believe that I stuffed up that bell for my own sake, because I wanted him? You can't believe that?

POWER: No!

HELEN: I knew it. I had to be rather nice with him, to lead him on. Of course it was mean of me, but it was for you. But, Bill, it did seem a long time before you came in. Another minute and I would have called for Gregory.

POWER: Gregory was listening at the door as I came in. He knew, then?

HELEN: Of course. He was a fellow-conspirator.

(*Holding out the smoothed glove.*)

It hasn't crumpled much, after all, has it?

POWER: And you did that for me?

HELEN: Oh, you'll have to buy another pair of gloves. You ought to be able to afford it. You're Premier still.

POWER: Ah, you have made me more than that. You have made me your husband.

(*He embraces her.*)

(*CURTAIN.*)

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